

A FRAMEWORK FOR LEARNING AND RESULTS IN COMMUNITY CHANGE INITIATIVES

**IMAGINE**

A black and white photograph of a diverse group of people of various ages and ethnicities, all smiling and looking towards the camera. The image is partially obscured by teal geometric shapes at the top and bottom. A teal square is overlaid on the image, containing the word "ACT" in white capital letters.

**ACT**

**BELIEVE**

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**About the Annie E. Casey Foundation**

The Annie E. Casey Foundation is a private charitable organization dedicated to helping build better futures for disadvantaged children in the United States. It was established in 1948 by Jim Casey, one of the founders of UPS, and his siblings, who named the Foundation in honor of their mother. The primary mission of the Foundation is to foster public policies, human-service reforms, and community supports that more effectively meet the needs of today's vulnerable children and families. In pursuit of this goal, the Foundation makes grants that help states, cities, and neighborhoods fashion more innovative, cost-effective responses to these needs. For more information, visit the Foundation's website at [www.aecf.org](http://www.aecf.org).

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# FOREWORD

Co-authors Terri Bailey and Audrey Jordan met in 2000, when the Annie E. Casey Foundation launched a multisite community change effort called *Making Connections*. The initiative tests the theory that children do better when their families do better, and families do better when they live in neighborhoods that provide opportunities for economic self-sufficiency and wealth; responsive, culturally relevant services; and social networks that empower residents and connect them to supports.

The initiative connects residents, neighborhood leaders, and representatives from government, community institutions, nonprofit organizations, service agencies, businesses, and faith institutions in an effort to strengthen families and neighborhoods. An important part of this work revolves around knowledge: collecting and analyzing data, using information about local strengths and needs as a tool for planning and advocacy, distilling and sharing knowledge, creating tools for using knowledge, and applying the learning to action.

To that end, *Making Connections* established Local Learning Partnerships—coalitions of people and groups whose work drives and supports local learning and action. Terri Bailey, senior research officer of The Piton Foundation, coordinated the learning partnership in Denver from 1999 to 2004. Audrey Jordan, a senior member of the Casey Foundation’s staff, was the evaluation liaison to Denver. The ideas in this *Framework for Learning and Results* come from our shared work in Denver as well as our cumulative, individual experiences.

We both were long-time researchers and practitioners of “knowledge creation” and community change initiatives, and we thought we were experts. But as we watched *Making Connections* unfold across the country, we realized that the links between learning and action usually occur more by happenstance than through any conscious effort. There are critical moments in any initiative when you come to understand something you hadn’t before, when you see clearly an alternative that just wasn’t there a moment ago. While not uncommon, these moments are special. We recognize their power, but we know very little about creating an environment in which more people have these moments more often. Too often the moments are lost, or we fail to sustain them, because we don’t have the time or ability to mine them for all they are worth. Instead, we succumb to the pressures of the task at hand.

We believe that creating and sustaining these moments of actionable learning *are* the tasks at hand, however, because they are vital to the results our initiatives seek. Co-author Leila Fiester, an independent writer/thinker who has helped the Casey Foundation frame, capture, analyze, and learn from *Making Connections* since 2000, shares that belief, and she joined this project midstream to help us distill and present our ideas.

This paper suggests strategies for becoming more intentional about learning and more disciplined about acting. Our framework is distinctive in three ways. It is grounded in **complexity science**. It focuses on **learning in unconventional ways**. And it is premised on our conviction

*This paper is part what we have lived, part what we know, and part what we aspire to. It marks a place we have arrived at in a journey that is not yet finished. We hope you’ll join us.*

that “community” is central to change, and therefore **those who are most affected by change must lead the work**. The last point is a dramatic departure from the traditional, top-down model for community change, and it is a powerful theme of this paper.

To produce this paper we read, reflected on, and spoke with many mentors, teachers, and guides. Patrice Flynn from Flynn Research in Harpers Ferry, West Virginia, helped us understand how to apply chaos theory to the work in *Making Connections* neighborhoods. Other assistance came from leaders of community organizing movements; crafters of the community building movement; and funders and government officials who, breaking with tradition, forged community relationships notable for their dignity and mutual respect. Our sources include the professionals, academics, and intermediaries who study, write about, or practice every day their skills and crafts for the betterment of community.

Thank you, Nick Bavaro, for the wonderful graphics that make our framework come to life.

Thank you to all those who reviewed and provided valuable feedback on various drafts, including Sharon Bridgeforth, Jim Kittel, Loretta Koehler, Phuonglan Nguyen, and Linda Wurst, resident members of Denver’s Local Learning Partnership; and Mary Achatz, Bahia Akerele, Andrea Anderson, Laura Birx, Frank Farrow, Tom Kelly, Tom Kern, Beth Leeson, Peg Logan, Jane Reisman, and Ralph Smith, all of whom provided rich insights that substantially improved our work.

And thank you, Annie E. Casey Foundation, for the funding that made this project possible.

Terri Bailey  
Audrey Jordan  
Leila Fiester

July 2006

## OUR ASSUMPTIONS

The authors of this framework have worked in a variety of **community change initiatives (CCIs)**. Some were led primarily by foundations, government agencies, or other power brokers from outside the community. Some were led primarily by professional community planners and developers working for the benefit of the community but relying on skills and capacities that were purchased or funded externally. And some were led primarily by residents and other representatives who are most affected by the conditions that the initiative aims to address.

Each type of initiative seeks resident and community participation. The residents' role, however, varies:

- In a **community-driven initiative**, the agenda for change reflects community priorities. Residents take action for themselves with help from professionals and funders, who work to develop resident leaders. Funders, professionals, and resident leaders are all accountable to the community.
- In a **professional-driven initiative**, the agenda reflects a combination of professional knowledge, information about community conditions, and resident input. Professionals take action on behalf of the community, although residents may participate on advisory committees or give informal feedback. Professionals are accountable to their funders and the community.
- In a **funder-driven initiative**, the agenda reflects the funder's priorities. The funder designates grantees to take action and achieve results. The grantees are accountable to their funder, but not necessarily to the community.

We do not want to imply that one model is better than the others for every situation. Much depends on existing skill, will, and opportunity, and many CCIs therefore operate somewhere in between the categories. **Our framework for learning and results, however, proposes that those who are the most affected in a community should (1) be engaged as co-equals in the work and (2) collectively take action.**

In a vacuum, those who are comfortable and experienced with power will always step into the void. The racism embedded in society's structures further divides those who have opportunity and privilege from those who do not. Our responsibility, then, is not just to act and express ourselves democratically but to enable others to have that opportunity for themselves.

We believe that this paper presents a useful framework for learning and action, no matter how you envision the role of residents. We hope, however, that you will share our belief that residents of low-income neighborhoods, participants in public systems, and consumers of public services can be primary actors in imagining and realizing their own futures.

*“I know no safe depository of the ultimate powers of the society but the people themselves, and if we think them not enlightened enough to exercise their control with a wholesome discretion, the remedy is not to take it from them but to inform their discretion.”*

— Thomas Jefferson

# I. FINDING ORDER IN CHAOS:

## An Overview of the Framework

We rarely hear people admit publicly that their community change initiative has failed. But the brutal fact is that most privately funded change initiatives fail or produce only mediocre results. Success is even more elusive in the public sector. Why?

There are many reasons, but two are especially pertinent: failure to understand the complexity of the task, and failure to learn from change. We address both issues in this chapter before outlining our new framework. Chapters II and III describe the framework's components in more depth.

Readers should keep two important points in mind throughout this framework. First, **the ideas we lay out represent an ideal.** They aren't imaginary; their seeds exist in every *Making Connections* site. They have not yet been fully or consistently realized, however.

Second, **the pieces of the framework that we describe need to be combined into a comprehensive package to get the best results.** It is the connections *across* and *among* our “essential conditions for change” and “essential elements of learning” that make it possible to imagine, believe in, and act upon better strategies for community change.

*“A great wind is blowing,  
and that gives you  
either imagination or  
a headache.”*

— Catherine II (“The Great”),  
Empress of Russia, 1729–1796

### UNDERSTANDING THE COMPLEXITY OF CHANGE

Three scientific theories can help us understand the complexity of community change:

- **Chaos theory** (the effort to find order within apparently random data) tells us we live in a world of contradictions. Thus an outcome that seems positive—neighborhood transformation, for instance—may have unintended negative consequences, such as gentrification that drives low-income residents out of the community.
- **Systems thinking** (the awareness that everything contributing to change is interdependent) defines a “system” as a group of independent variables with a common purpose. That definition applies to community change initiatives, too. In systems theory, as with CCIs, it is hard to predict which actions will cause specific effects, because the factors on which we base our predictions are always changing. Results also depend on how each part of the system interacts with the rest.
- **Complexity science** (the effort to understand complex, apparently accidental patterns), suggests that the seemingly chaotic environment in which CCIs operate is, in fact, healthy and normal.

Thinking about chaos, systems, and complexity leads us to these observations about CCIs (Eoyang and Berkas 1998; Flynn 2003):

- 1. CCI's are dynamic.**  
CCIs are always in a state of flux. The sheer number of participants, activities, and projects results in constant change.
- 2. CCI's are unpredictable.**  
Change happens at every point in time but not along predictable paths. Movement occurs in bursts or not at all. The moments in which something just clicks, or someone “gets it,” or an idea catches on, cannot be planned. A plus B equals C once; the next time, the equation may produce an entirely different effect.
- 3. CCI's elements (people, programs, organizations) are interrelated.**  
CCIs encompass a web of relationships and behaviors. Their structure does not lend itself to linear or hierarchical patterns. CCIs operate more as spheres of influence than as direct causes of effects.
- 4. CCI's are transformative.**  
The interactions sparked by CCIs produce irreversible change. Leaders are developed; skills are built; knowledge is gained. We can never return to the starting point, because it no longer exists.
- 5. Control and order emerge organically.**  
New patterns and relationships form constantly within CCIs. These structural changes cannot be designed or imposed from the outside. Time and space for creativity, reflection, and iterative growth are therefore powerful tools for achieving CCIs' results.

## **LEARNING FROM CHANGE**

If community change initiatives are so . . . well . . . complex, then how are we to act? How are we to plan for success and recognize it when we see it? The answer, we believe, is by making learning the heart of the change process as well as a primary outcome of the initiative.

Two types of learning, identified by social research, are especially relevant to our framework: self-directed learning and transformational learning.

**Self-directed learning** focuses on the processes by which people (in our case, a community and its members) control their own learning, identify learning goals, select learning methods, and evaluate their progress (Brookfield 1995). Those actions are shaped by experiences, a shared vision, a learning goal, the political environment, and issues of power and control. Before communities can make good choices and judgments about learning, they must address those issues and their underlying dynamics: culture, race, class, and gender.

**Transformational learning** occurs as people examine the assumptions on which their community operates and develop new practices based on new assumptions. It is the process by which we recognize and reframe the roles and relationships dictated by our cultures (Schein 1995).

Transformational learning isn't about creating new tools and techniques. It's about changing who we are and how we act—taking our new knowledge and insights and embedding



them in routine practices. The box at the right poses some questions to ask yourself about your community's learning process. You'll find more of these boxes throughout the *Framework*; their purpose is to help you convert the ideas into actions.

## THE FRAMEWORK

Claus Otto Scharmer (2002) writes that to every farmer, a field is a living system with two aspects: the visible, which we see above the surface; and the invisible, which we find below the surface. No matter what actions the farmer takes, the quality of the harvest depends on aspects of the field that are invisible to the eye, such as the richness of the soil. Scharmer says we haven't learned how to see below the surface, to decipher the subtle structures and principles that shape our outcomes, and to be as deliberate about enhancing the quality of the field as we are about producing results.

We have tried to correct that failing in this framework, which contains (1) **essential conditions for change** (conditions and environments that indicate whether a community is ready) and (2) **essential elements of learning** (fundamental ingredients and basic structures and supports that successful CCIs require).

**Neither the conditions nor the elements are menus from which you can pick and choose.** Essential conditions represent what happens "below the surface," and essential elements capture what happens "above the surface." Both components, working effectively together, produce learning, action, and results.

### *Essential Conditions for Change*

Community change initiatives don't operate in a vacuum. To emerge, take root, and flourish, a CCI needs certain core ingredients in place. Among the most essential conditions are:

1. **Willingness to learn** and imagine a better way of doing things.
2. **Belief** that the new way of doing things will work and the will to act on the conviction.
3. **Knowledge of the community's context and history**, especially the nuances and impact of race, politics, social networks, and other initiatives or programs that have operated in the area.
4. **Leadership capacity**, along with continual efforts to develop and replenish the supply of community leaders. The process of becoming a leader prepares stakeholders to participate in a democratic process and provides a structure for shifting power to those who are most affected by community conditions or by the desired changes.

## QUESTIONS TO ADDRESS ABOUT LEARNING

### Do you and your colleagues:

- Look specifically for the "differences that make a difference?" (Eoyang and Berkas 1998)
- See the unexpected as well as the expected?
- Value both transformation and results?
- Take time to reflect on *how* you are doing as well as *what* you are doing and *why*?
- Constantly feed information back into the system to generate further change and transformation?
- Engage with each other?
- See yourselves simultaneously as students, teachers, experts, and apprentices?

5. **Relationships and a shared a sense of teamwork.** Social relationships encourage and provide neighbor-to-neighbor support, help people overcome the isolation of living and working alone, and overcome geographical, racial, class, and power differences.

Our framework will not tell you how to create these conditions. We assume that they already exist in your community and you are ready to build on them. If they do not yet exist, we suggest you start there.

This framework is primarily about what happens above the surface, the fundamental ingredients that support learning in action.

### *Essential Elements of Learning*

There are five essential elements of learning:

1. A commonly held and well-understood **vision for change** that includes core values and principles of engagement
2. A **theory of change** or plan that specifies where you are going (the results) and how you plan to get there (the strategies)
3. **Measurement and evaluation** of the outcomes and of interim benchmarks that show what is happening, what is working, and what needs improvement or adaptation
4. **Knowledge creation**; that is, an effort to develop new ideas, reflect on the links between what you do and what you accomplish, imagine a better way to do things, and disperse the knowledge widely
5. Investment in creating, adopting, and adapting **knowledge-based tools** that enable all stakeholders—not just a few individuals—to move ahead with common insight, understanding, and accountability

## **GETTING TO RESULTS**

The point of talking about essential conditions for change and essential elements of learning is to improve the way we think and act about community change so we can produce better results for communities and their residents. Learning doesn't lead to results on its own; someone or some group also has to believe change is possible, imagine a better way of doing things, and take action.

The actions traditionally taken by CCIs look something like this: search for national models of practices and programs to emulate; find what is already happening locally and make it more successful; develop separate strategies for each major goal; engage powerful movers and shakers who can command their organizations' activities and resources; demonstrate success quickly; and use early results to select a few successful strategies for investment.

We propose a different path to results. We believe that the essential conditions and elements should be harnessed to **community mobilizing and action**—that is, working with residents and community stakeholders to achieve core results.

A FRAMEWORK FOR LEARNING AND RESULTS



Figure 1

Getting to results is about taking these actions:

- **Challenging the status quo.** Ask yourself whether current actions reflect community priorities: Are they getting positive results?
- **Getting out of silos.** Recognize that all problems and solutions are interrelated, and design strategies in which everyone shares responsibility for all goals. One goal of early education, for example, should be to help parents find jobs that pay a family-supporting wage—just as preparing young children for school should be a goal of economic development.
- **Engaging hundreds (if not thousands) of residents and stakeholders.** Work with them to develop the skills and opportunities they need to take action. Connect them to powerful institutions and others willing to act in support of a community agenda.
- **Learning from the past.** Study previous actions and their results to avoid reinventing the wheel and repeating past mistakes. Use those lessons to invent, innovate, and sow the seeds of new ideas.
- **Encouraging risk.** Expect and tolerate failure as long as people learn from it.
- **Sharing credit.** Allow community members to celebrate successes as their own achievements.

The chapters that follow show how the essential conditions and elements fit together in a way we envision as a model of concentric circles (figure 1). Chapter II outlines five conditions for change that we believe are most important for success. Chapter III presents the five essential elements of learning, including tips for applying the ideas to priority results, examples, and a list of resources for more information.

The chapters build on the observations we made at the beginning of this overview: First, CCIs are constantly changing, unpredictable, deeply interrelated and interdependent, transformative, and organic. The keys to working successfully in this seemingly chaotic environment are to implement the framework flexibly, moving fluidly between “tilling the soil” and “harvesting the results”; to keep the focus on achieving results; and to put community residents at the center of the work.

Second, the essential conditions of change and elements of learning work together to produce action and results; neither one, on its own, is sufficient.

And third, movement from the status quo to a better outcome involves taking data (a raw material) and converting it into information (a product), building information into knowledge and sharing it broadly (a process or transaction), converting knowledge into a tool and resource that one can use to change the community, and finally taking collective action to produce the desired results. In this sense, knowledge is the link between learning and action.

## II. ESSENTIAL CONDITIONS FOR CHANGE

An exhaustive list of conditions for change would be very long and would likely run the gamut from desire for change to leadership to financial resources. Those are all important and fundamental building blocks. But for the purposes of this framework, we emphasize five conditions that are closest to our focus on learning and results: a willingness to learn, a culture of belief, knowledge of the community, leadership capacity, and teamwork.

### 1. WILLINGNESS TO LEARN

Peter Senge (1996) writes that moving from theory to results means getting people to think systemically, to see and appreciate the interdependence of their areas of work, and to act in ways that truly support the whole—**skills** that don't always come naturally. Senge further suggests that to prepare for action, we need leaders who have **knowledge** about the relevant issues. Thus people who seek to change their environment must be willing to learn new knowledge and skills.

Learning is especially important at the beginning of an initiative, when people and organizations need to share knowledge, refine their skills, and build confidence. Learning is best done in the context of one's work, so it's essential to give people early opportunities to do things together and achieve quick wins. These might include: (1) developing a CCI's theory of change or guiding principles; (2) organizing a resident-led community summit; (3) training new leaders; or (4) successfully advocating for a small but meaningful change (e.g., getting a streetlight for a troublesome intersection).

*It is impossible to imagine an orchestra or sports team that never practices (Kofman and Senge 1993). Yet CCIs routinely expect people to perform without honing their skills, knowledge, and confidence.*

### 2. A CULTURE OF BELIEF

Efforts to change a community often begin because someone cares about a problem and wants to fix it. But caring is not enough to produce significant and lasting results. We also must *believe* that the desired results are achievable and worth working for. As *Making Connections*' chief architect, Ralph Smith, explained early in the initiative (the Annie E. Casey Foundation 2002):

In too many classrooms across the country, we have teachers who, while caring deeply about the children they teach, no longer believe they can help these children beat the odds. They expect to be overwhelmed by the challenges of the environments within which these children live. So they close their doors and try within their classrooms to create an oasis of sorts. These teachers have, in effect, become hospice workers—helping their charges in the face of the inevitable. That is unacceptable. Admirable as hospice work is, it is inappropriate for teachers.

I sometimes wonder whether, despite the rhetoric, we as a field have not joined those teachers in the hospice movement. . . . We [must] believe that we can help to change

for the better the lives and futures of the families who live and work and worship and raise their children in these neighborhoods.

Belief is crucial because it feeds widespread public will to improve conditions, sparks collaboration among diverse stakeholders, and inspires individuals to take action.

An important part of *believing* is being willing to *take risks*. It takes a leap of faith to mobilize community change, partly because CCI's are relatively unproven and their practices are still evolving. That fact, combined with the size, expense, and complexity of comprehensive change initiatives—and the sometimes unreasonable desire for early results—can lead people to fall back on conventional plans and strategies that haven't worked in the past and may even be at odds with the community's interests. Communities that are ready to change have, to some degree, the conviction and strength of will to forge unconventional partnerships, adopt promising but unproven strategies, and launch ambitious projects.

### **3. KNOWLEDGE OF THE COMMUNITY**

Too many initiatives have been imposed on communities without regard for the unique factors and circumstances of the neighborhood or population. Those initiatives almost always fail, even when they use a model that worked well somewhere else. The lesson is clear: Localized knowledge is the key to making good choices about community change.

What is it, exactly, that people must know? The answer changes over the course of a CCI. At first, information that can shape a vision, a theory of change, and an action plan is most useful. Consider the context in which the community operates. For example:

- Is the community in a state of change (for better or for worse) or is it stable or even stagnant?
- How have local opportunities or threats already affected the community?
- How did earlier efforts to improve the neighborhood end—with noticeable and lasting change or with money down the drain and strained relationships?
- Do elected and appointed officials pay attention to the community?
- Are there places in the community where people congregate?
- Are there established groups through which residents can voice their opinions?
- Are there people in the community who operate as gatekeepers?
- How do funders, nonprofit organizations, public officials, and other power brokers help these gatekeepers stay in control?

Initially, data and information about a community (such as demographic and socio-economic characteristics) will probably come from outside sources. Over time, however, CCI's should generate their own community data and information.

### **4. LEADERSHIP CAPACITY**

Author Margaret Wheatley writes that “the need for new leaders is urgent . . . in communities everywhere. We need leaders who know how to nourish and rely on the innate creativity, freedom, generosity, and caring of people. We need leaders who are life-affirming rather than life-

destroying” (2002). Wheatley dubbed these new leaders “paradigm pioneers.”

Such leaders enable action because they help people comprehend what the initiative stands for, what it will do, and how it will do it. Leadership *capacity* is essential because it prepares community stakeholders and future change agents to take part in a democratic process—to act on their own behalf, alongside others who support their actions, and to shape an environment that produces good results.

Unfortunately, CCIs often struggle to recruit enough new leaders and bring them up to speed. The people who will shepherd a CCI along the road to change rarely enter the initiative with all the necessary skills. And, because collective learning requires collective leadership, a CCI always needs more (and more diverse) people to play leadership roles.

Traditional ways of developing leaders are geared toward moving people up a hierarchy with increasing amounts of personal power and responsibility. In that model, the goal is to teach individual process skills for negotiating the ladder. CCIs’ principles, however, emphasize equality and exclude behavior that does for residents that which they could do for themselves. Thus CCI leaders must know how to lead *and* follow, and they must earn the right to lead others toward a common purpose. They need skills for *collective processes* such as team building, accountability, understanding and undoing racism, analyzing power, and creating opportunities for community action.

We realize it is unconventional to think of leadership as being shared by many people who are exchangeable but not replaceable, and as being a collective endeavor. But for CCIs, shared leadership reduces the chance that community understanding will be challenged, diluted, or replaced whenever leaders join or leave the initiative.

## 5. RELATIONSHIPS AND TEAMWORK

If it takes a village to raise a child, it takes many people working together—in ways that they choose and on issues that matter to them—to change a village. The sense of mutual responsibility and mutual benefit that comes from strong relationships transforms mere activities into a movement for broader community change.

### TIPS FOR COMBINING THE ESSENTIAL CONDITIONS FOR CHANGE

- Find ways for leaders to practice new skills and to learn whether and how to act when leadership opportunities arise.
- Encourage risk taking, and then tell the truth about positive and negative consequences.
- Constantly reach out to new leaders and bring them into the mix. Orient new leaders to the skills and knowledge they need to participate fully.
- Foster leaders’ collective process skills (e.g., team building, accountability, understanding and undoing racism, analyzing power, and creating opportunities for community action) as well as individual skills, such as public speaking and fundraising.
- Debunk community myths. Infuse efforts with data, information, and validation from trusted sources (especially community residents).
- Don’t overstructure the CCI. A structure that emerges naturally and evolves over time has more credibility with community members.
- Promote nonhierarchical relationships at every level and stage of the CCI. Initiative staff should be facilitators, not leaders.
- Provide space and opportunities for individuals and families to come together voluntarily for their own purposes. Relationships emerge from personal connections, not meetings.
- Have fun. There is nothing so powerful as laughter.

People cannot form a mutually supportive network or an effective team, however, unless they understand their relationships to each other and to the goals and work they share. In distressed communities, that level of understanding is undermined by residents' mobility, isolation, and fear and by the supply-side approach to community change, in which outsiders "experts" decide and deliver what they think resident "clients" need.

In a demand-side approach to community change, however, community members set and regulate community-change priorities and activities, working in partnership with others within and outside the community. This means more than getting different people together in the same room. It means creating opportunities for people from different backgrounds and experiences to meet, interact, and join forces to achieve a shared goal. It means recognizing that relationships are mutual and reciprocal, that each person has something to contribute and something to learn. It's an exchange. And it means highlighting the successes achieved by teams or networks so people stay in the relationship.

*"If you [focus] strictly on service, when that need is resolved you're done. In a movement, you're never done. The specific items may be taken care of, but you still belong to it because it's greater than yourself."*

— UFW member, South Texas  
(Bailey 2006)



### III. ESSENTIAL ELEMENTS OF LEARNING

Successful, sustainable CCIs have several core elements that help collaborators learn, imagine, believe, and act strategically to achieve results. We call these the **essential elements of learning**, and we focus on five in particular: a vision for change, a theory of change, measurement and evaluation of change, knowledge creation and reflection, and creating knowledge-based tools.

#### 1. CREATING A VISION FOR CHANGE

The ability to forge a collective vision of desired results—and the ability to hold people to that vision—is essential. A well-understood, widely

shared vision for change helps individuals become agents of change rather than the subjects of someone else’s action. Vision-setting, therefore, is not just an activity; it is a learning process that makes clear people’s concerns, goals, agendas, and aspirations. It reflects the community’s priority outcomes, whether that means all adults are employed or all children are healthy and prepared for school.

Although a shared vision intersects the whole community’s hopes for the future, a vision is greater than the sum of the *common* interests. A real vision for community change captures many different points of view. It establishes shared values and principles of engagement. It cultivates broad ownership. And it points to a common destination.

#### *Capturing Diverse Points of View*

Assuming that you already know the community’s history and context—something we view as an essential condition for change—the next step is to convene the people who are most affected by community problems or conditions. Typically, these are neighborhood residents. But think carefully about whom you invite to the table, because the mere act of establishing the table is both an opportunity to develop skills and commitment and at times an unintended opportunity to “anoint” leaders. Be as inclusive and far-reaching as possible, and put community members front and center. Check your assumptions about the community against objective data, such as U.S. Census data and local data systems that track demographic characteristics, housing, education, employment, and other indicators at the neighborhood level. Figure out which people aren’t already at the table, and reach out to them.

Then, listen. Community summits, neighborhood discussion circles, intensive outreach by trusted leaders or organizations, and convenings to discuss

*The quality of a vision for change depends on who the vision setters are, how well they operate as a group, and how committed they are to change.*



#### QUESTIONS TO ASK ABOUT THE VISION FOR CHANGE

- **Whose views** should the vision represent? The community, agency partners, the funder, staff of the initiative, or some combination? How will you know that the vision represents diverse points of view?
- **What expectations** do you have for the vision setters? Is there a role for them after the vision is established and, if so, what is it? How will you get them to commit to future work?
- How will the vision be **used**? Is the vision detailed enough to define goals and set priorities for action?
- How will the vision be **communicated** to new participants and to the broader community?

## TIPS FOR DEVELOPING A COMMON VISION

- Rely on trusted community members or organizations to conduct outreach.
- Precede or follow community summits with other processes (e.g., house meetings, one-on-one conversations, church gatherings) to make sure you have heard from the people most directly affected by neighborhood conditions or by your planned actions. Many *Making Connections* sites use a process variously called Neighborhood Circles, Family Circles, Story Circles, or Study Circles to put residents in the position of convening, facilitating, training, listening, and acting to develop a vision for change.
- Negotiate goals or intended results that all stakeholders can accept and work toward.
- Provide training that helps residents and other stakeholders understand how internalized oppression can affect their readiness to lead and participate in community change.
- Give people opportunities to form relationships by working together on successful early efforts.
- Develop values and principles of engagement to give the vision a solid core. Figure out how the vision will incorporate such values as democracy, equality, fairness, and justice.
- Enforce the rules through group will. When enough people embrace the principles and values, a vision becomes more than just words—it is a unifying, sustainable force for change.
- Practice the principles. People develop a collective identity, trust, faith, commitment, and power by practicing together. Through practice, the rules of engagement become concrete.
- Repeat the principles often. Carry them in your wallet. Post them on the wall. Make them your own, and share them with everyone.

specific issues are all good ways to collect opinions, ideas, and concerns. The point is to make sure that everyone who wants to speak gets to do so, and every speaker knows his or her voice is valued.

### *Establishing Shared Values and Principles of Engagement*

Principles are the rules of engagement that tell CCI participants how to interact with each other (and with the community) and what to expect of themselves and others. They express the initiative's core values, and in that sense, they create a social community that parallels the geographic one.

Values and principles govern the outcomes we aspire to achieve. By focusing us on getting results for the hardest-to-reach populations, they force *us* to reach. They tell us it is *not* okay to celebrate improved homeownership rates if they were achieved through the forces of gentrification and displacement, and it is *not* okay to call declining foster care rates a success if they go down only for white children.

Values and principles also govern the process by which we achieve results. They hold us accountable for practicing democracy, for eliminating inequities, for halting the damage that results from our actions when we are not careful or thoughtful.

### *Cultivating Ownership*

Make sure everyone knows that (a) the vision, values, and principles are the rules the CCI will live by; (b) people can call other people out for not honoring the principles; and (c) they can be called out themselves.

Encourage passive observers of community change to become actors and partners in change. This includes people who work or serve in the community as well as residents. Often, this means overcoming disappointment, helplessness, and cynicism planted by previous initiatives, especially those in which outsiders asked for community opinions, raised expectations, and then did nothing. Some stakeholders may also need to recognize their own role, however unwitting, in perpetuating racial and class privilege.

The bottom line is that people who have considered themselves “done to” need to see themselves as “doers” who have the power to improve their own lives and community. They also must accept and value each other's contributions. A good way to do this is by making sure that

## MAKING CONNECTIONS—DENVER: GUIDING PRINCIPLES IN ACTION

Early in the initiative, the Local Learning Partnership (called the “Community Learning Network”) hosted community discussions to develop *Making Connections*—Denver’s principles. Participants drafted a document based on those conversations and presented it to organized groups of residents working in the community. These principles emerged:

**We believe in promotion of human dignity.** Communities will promote human dignity and respect, protect basic human rights, and prevent exploitation of their members.

**We commit to:**

- Strengthening families’ right to raise their children without fear, intimidation, or humiliation based on identity or poverty
- Formulating resident agendas that promote dignity and basic human rights and prevent and address exploitation
- Organizing residents and others to work together across racial, cultural, age, gender, language, class, and other boundaries
- Strengthening authentic, deep relationships that are safe and support personal and community healing

**We believe in equalization of power.** Residents will accumulate and express collective, inclusive, and responsible power for the improvement of their families and communities. **We commit to:**

- Creating opportunities for residents and other leaders to develop, practice, and refine leadership skills and capacities
- Constantly broadening and deepening resident involvement
- Acknowledging the importance of learning, of having opportunities to learn, and of honoring the different learning styles in the community to achieving community change
- Strategically collecting and using data and other information for planning and decision making
- Insisting that resident organizations are democratically controlled
- Building a sustainable, organized resident power base

- Formulating a resident agenda that measurably improves the quality of life for families and children in multiple ways

**We believe in transformed organizations and institutions.**

Residents will effect transformative and sustainable change in community organizations, public and private institutions, and their communities. **We commit to:**

- Insisting upon the responsible use of power to influence and support the community’s agenda
- Providing opportunities to build sustainable relationships among families and between families and the organizations that serve them
- Supporting resident access and ability to influence the decision-making processes of organizations and institutions that affect their families’ economic and social well-being
- Increasing or redirecting public and private resources to reflect resident priorities
- Promoting the primacy of resident power in matters affecting communities

It wasn’t the mere creation of guiding principles that made a difference in Denver, however. It was the fact that people used the principles to guide every activity and every relationship within, and between, every organization involved in community change. When the principles were finalized, the institutional and organizational leaders who partnered with *Making Connections*—Denver were asked to honor and advance them in their work. The principles were institutionalized in contracts and grant terms. Guidelines were developed to infuse the principles into routine functions, such as communications, research, and evaluation. For example, the Community Learning Network developed guidelines to operationalize the principles in research and evaluation activities. Residents must play decision-making roles in all research and evaluation projects in their community. All research projects must include knowledge- and skill-building activities for residents, including paid opportunities. Ownership of all reports, tools, and products belongs exclusively to community members to use as they see fit.

*Guiding principles represent a covenant among CCI participants. They hold us accountable for practicing democracy. They are the basis for all decisions—the litmus test for all action, behavior, and results. Without such a covenant, CCIs inevitably fall into the hands of a few stakeholders who act on behalf of the community rather than with it.*

residents play major roles in community discussions and planning sessions.

When residents are at the head of the room, facilitating debate and soliciting advice from their peers, people begin to understand that the entire community must act in order to change.

An initiative's goals for change—its intended results—should be measurable, clearly stated, and well-understood, or else people may not commit to them. Even so, some negotiation among stakeholders usually is necessary to cultivate broad support. The important thing is to make sure residents have a meaningful role in setting the vision and that the process protects the outcomes sought by the people who most directly feel the CCI's impact. In fact, the goals will reflect community desires most accurately if a representative group of stakeholders sets them *before* other interested parties join the initiative.

## **2. CREATING A THEORY OF CHANGE**

A theory of change is a plan for learning and action. It describes the results you hope to produce and your logic for how to achieve them: *We will do X in order to achieve Y and Z* (Connell and Kubisch 1998). A theory of change lists the actors, actions, and relationships that will contribute to the results. And it weaves all of those elements into a coherent, inter-related set of strategies capable of achieving results.

We use the word “theory” because there is no proven path to success for CCIs. The choices we make are really informed guesses, hypotheses to be proved or disproved—even when we incorporate knowledge gleaned from previous initiatives, research, and common sense. Moreover, CCIs encompass many strands of activity (economic, political, and social) operating at many levels (community, institutional, family, and individual) (Connell and Kubisch 1998). CCIs are constructed by diverse stakeholders, working together but not always agreeing with each other. And, CCIs evolve over time.

In the midst of such chaos and complexity, a theory of change gives some coherence; it helps us think systemically. You don't even have to call it a “theory.” The important thing is to have a plan that is detailed and thorough enough to help participants work together, evaluate and learn from their actions, and build on their successes as the initiative evolves.

Our *Framework for Learning and Results* suggests three steps in developing a theory of change: Mapping the vision, aligning the contributions of various actors, and creating a set of strategies for collective action.

### ***Mapping Your Vision***

Mapping out your vision involves specifying where you are now, where you are headed, and what you need to get there. For whom are you trying to improve outcomes, and what specific improve-



ments are you aiming for? How much improvement is needed to achieve “success”? What achievements along the path to ultimate success will tell you that you are making progress? How much time, money, and other resources will it take to produce the changes? What conditions will make action possible?

As you answer these questions, draw a simple map that illustrates your assumptions about which actions are needed, and what conditions need to be met, in order to move from present conditions to early outcomes, then intermediate outcomes, and finally long-term outcomes. It helps to map backward from the long-term outcome(s) to the present, because you won't have a clear sense of what conditions are needed until you are clear about where you're headed. (See figure 2.)

Keep mapping and re-mapping until you have a picture that is detailed enough to use for planning. (For more on “backward mapping” and other steps in developing a theory of change, see the Aspen Institute Roundtable on Community Change at [www.theoryofchange.org](http://www.theoryofchange.org).)

As you map your vision, concentrate on how each action or resource links to an outcome and how each outcome leads to the next. Some outcomes cannot be achieved without some kind of intervention; others can. Think about what interventions will help your CCI move along the path to results. The Aspen Institute Roundtable on Community Change likens this stage of mapping to recipe writing: You begin with a list of essential ingredients and then have to explain what to do with each ingredient and how to combine them correctly.

The people who turn the vision into a roadmap should be the CCI's resident stakeholders, practitioners, and other agents of change. Too often, this task falls to the initiative's evaluators, who are not as intimately involved with the vision. Furthermore, evaluators see the theory of change primarily as a tool for—surprise!—evaluation.

Theories of change can take many shapes but usually include, at a minimum, the assumptions the CCI is built on, the planned interventions, and the outcomes both intermediate and long term that you expect will result from the work. As the CCI progresses and you learn more about whether your initial assumptions were correct and what interventions in what combination lead to results, expect to modify and adapt your theory to better achieve the change you want.

Stakeholders and practitioners, meanwhile, usually view the theory more broadly. For them, it can be a powerful tool to guide action and practice, stimulate learning, build commitment, and enforce accountability to the vision. And the process of developing the theory

## QUESTIONS TO ASK ABOUT A THEORY OF CHANGE

- **Where** are you now, where are you going, and what do you need to do to get there?
- **Is the theory plausible?** Do evidence and common sense suggest that the activities, if implemented, will lead to the desired outcomes?
- **Is it doable?** Will economic, technical, political, institutional, and human resources be available to carry out the initiative?
- **Is it testable?** Is the theory of change specific and complete enough for an evaluator to track its progress in credible and useful ways?
- **Is the theory meaningful** to all stakeholders? Do community and other stakeholders agree with the goals and outcomes and believe that this set of activities will lead to the desired results?

— Connell and Kubisch (1998)

*The quality of a theory of change depends on the quality of stakeholders' vision for change and their commitment to moving it forward.*

## A SAMPLE CCI THEORY OF CHANGE

### ASSUMPTIONS

Foundation and community working in partnership can strengthen families and the neighborhoods in which they live to produce better results for vulnerable children by . . .

Connecting families to accessible, affordable, family-centered and culturally appropriate services and supports

Connecting families to networks of friends, neighbors, kin, faith-based institutions, community organizations, and civic groups

Connecting families to labor markets, affordable goods and services, and ability to accumulate savings and assets

### INTERVENTIONS

Foundation helps to enhance capacity, seed opportunities, and provide access to knowledge.  
Community partners build relationships, leverage resources, and reduce barriers.  
Together they...

Create a shared vision

Promote resident leadership

Form partnerships

Implement strategies and ideas

Enhance capacity to transform systems

Feed data, build knowledge, and promote learning

Communicate effectively to build public will for change

### OUTCOMES

Community mobilizes for action and results

Powerful strategies emerge

Strategies go to scale

#### Core results:

- Families have increased earnings and income.
- Families have increased levels of assets.
- Children are healthy and ready to succeed in school.
- Families, youth, and neighborhoods increase their civic participation.
- Families and neighborhoods have strong informal supports and networks.
- Families have access to quality services and supports that work for them.

Source: From the Annie E. Casey Foundation *Making Connections* theory of change, working document. Available at [www.aecf.org](http://www.aecf.org).

Figure 2

builds the participants' understanding and ownership of the intended results and the plan for achieving them.

The final step in mapping the vision is to convert the theory into an evaluation framework by developing benchmarks, identifying indicators of outcomes, establishing measures of progress, and locating data sources. (For more on evaluation, see section 3 of this chapter.)

### *Aligning the Efforts of Various Contributors*

Positive change rarely occurs on its own; people make it happen. Therefore, a theory of change needs to spell out what specific people will do to make the initiative work. The process of identifying roles and negotiating relationships is complex and never-ending.

A theory of change is a blueprint that shows how each person or entity contributes to the initiative's goals and how all of the contributions align with, or relate to, each other.

You also will need to know what resources are available, including partners, money, and community assets. Think about what each participant in the CCI brings to the table, not what he or she takes away. If stakeholders and practitioners don't have the resources the initiative needs, expand the table. Locate and invite additional partners whose contributions align with the initiative's theory.

Finally, alignment requires knowledge about "best" or promising practices for getting to results. Some of this knowledge about what works comes from the successes and failures of previous initiatives (although what works for one CCI does not necessarily work for another).

### *Creating Strategies for Collective Action*

After aligning resources and responsibilities, the next step is to create a coherent, interrelated set of strategies that enable individuals to act with shared ownership and commitment. A CCI's theory of change influences strategy choices by helping to answer the following questions:

- **Weight:** What is the most important result, and what activities are most likely to produce it? Where should we invest the most resources?
- **Scale:** How much is enough? What is the tipping point?

## TIPS FOR CREATING A LOCAL THEORY OF CHANGE

- Consider whether this is the right time to create a theory of change. Laying out a theory too early can stifle the dynamic nature of a community initiative. But a theory of change helps make decisions and is essential for evaluation.
- Involve residents and other frontline change agents as participants in developing the theory of change.
- Don't develop a theory of change merely to guide evaluation. Envision it as a roadmap for action and practice, and evaluation will follow.
- Make sure the theory gives clear guidance on the destination and path but remains flexible enough to respond to opportunities and threats along the way.
- Action doesn't happen in a vacuum. Consider the impact of contextual factors (e.g., policies, race relations in the community) and environmental factors (e.g., the economy, upcoming elections).
- Don't let work on the theory of change compete with other activities for initiative resources.
- Assume that all good practices adopted from elsewhere will need to be adapted over time.
- Assume that some of the strategies needed to achieve your desired results have yet to be invented.

*It matters less that the theory of change is “correct” than whether resident stakeholders and practitioners have participated in the planning process and are committed to moving ahead together.*

- **Relationships:** How do individual pathways to results contribute to or gain from each other? How are they connected to the big picture? Are they dependent on or independent of each other?
- **Sequence:** Is there a necessary order to the activities? If so, how can we preserve our flexibility so we can respond to new opportunities or threats as they appear?
- **Timing:** How long will this work take? How will we know when we’re ready to move on to the next stage of the plan?

## PROJECT SUPERWOMAN: A THEORY OF CHANGE

Project Superwoman trains women who live at a domestic violence shelter for nontraditional employment (e.g., electrical, plumbing, carpentry, and maintenance work), then helps them find and keep jobs. Project founders made these assumptions:

- A.** There are jobs available for the target population in nontraditional fields of employment.
- B.** These jobs are more likely to be unionized, pay a livable wage, and provide job security. Some also provide a ladder of upward mobility.
- C.** Women who have been in abusive relationships need to be emotionally ready for work as well as skilled in the job requirements.
- D.** Women can learn nontraditional jobs and compete for them in the marketplace.
- E.** The program cannot help all women or meet all of participants’ needs; therefore, applicants must meet specific criteria.
- F.** Women who have left abusive relationships are often single mothers and cannot work unless they have child care.
- G.** Program participants must have left the abusive situation they were in.

Based on those assumptions, the founders chose these interventions:

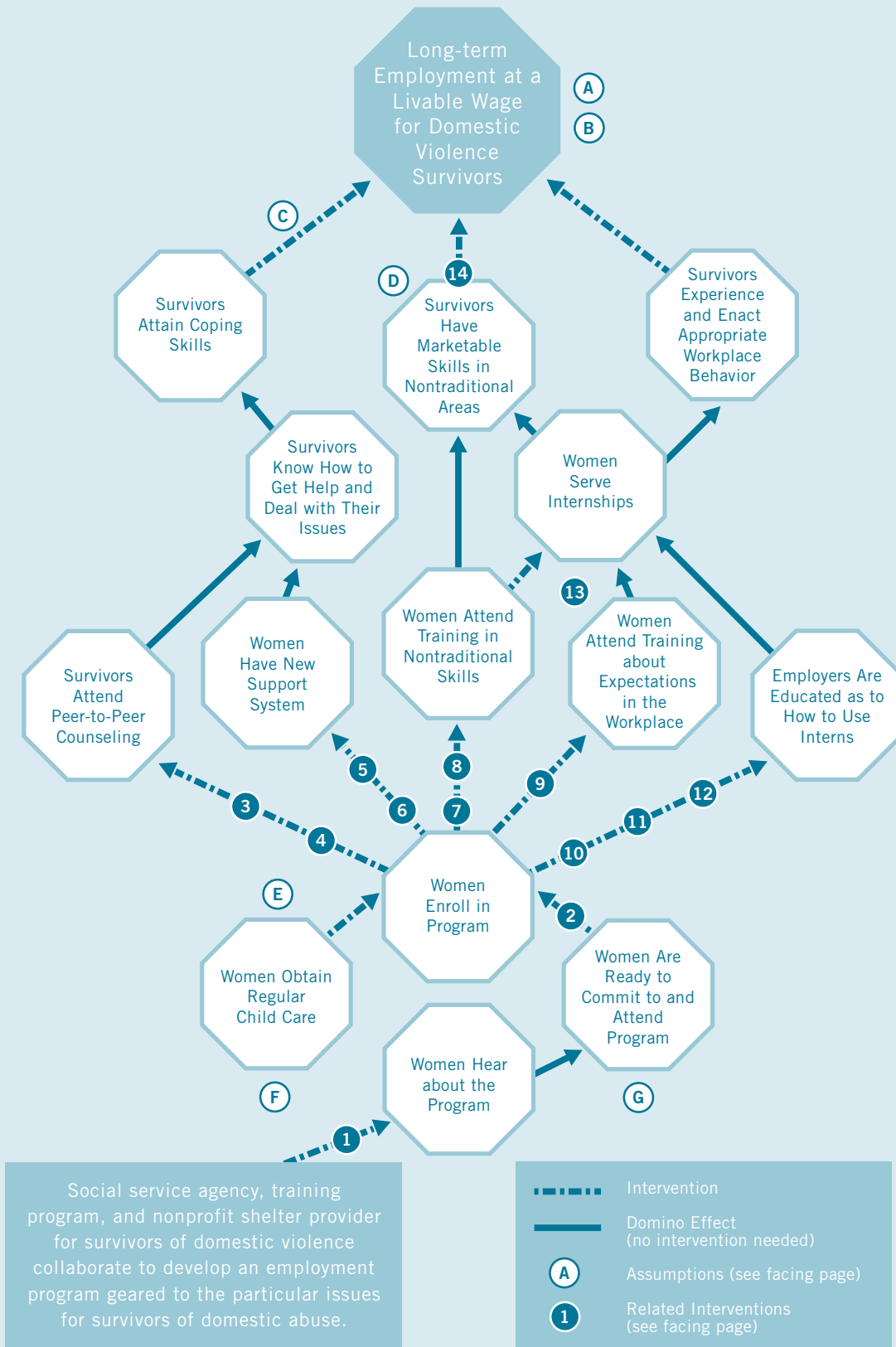
1. Outreach campaign
2. Screening of applicants
3. Links to counseling
4. Group sessions
5. Help with short-term crises, such as evictions or court appearances
6. One-on-one counseling
7. Development of job training curricula
8. Provision of job training
9. Development of curricula for experiential learning
10. Provision of experiential learning
11. Identification of potential employers
12. Creation of employer database
13. Matching of applicants to internships
14. Assistance securing permanent jobs

Project Superwoman’s theory of change is shown in figure 3.





## PROJECT SUPERWOMAN: A THEORY OF CHANGE



Source: Anderson, A., 2005.

Figure 3

### 3. MEASUREMENT AND EVALUATION

Evaluator Susan Philliber contends that good evaluation in community change initiatives should serve as a smoke detector, not an autopsy (1998).



Evaluation is an iterative process that both tracks and contributes to community change. It leads to action by setting targets for results, identifying baseline starting points, and measuring progress against benchmarks of success. And it supports learning by giving people the information they need to improve strategies and practices.

Measurement is an important part of evaluation, but it isn't the main point. As Andrew Mott suggests, too great a focus on the indicators of progress that are easiest to measure might divert energy from other significant but hard-to-count work (2003). A more relevant focus, Mott contends, is: *What are we learning, and how well are we applying that knowledge?*

So if learning is a primary objective of evaluation, what typically gets in the way? (1) Lack of clarity about the purpose of the evaluation; (2) a poor relationship between the funders who require evaluation, the evaluators conducting the evaluation, and the people being evaluated (Mott); and (3) the unwillingness or inability to credential community wisdom.

#### QUESTIONS TO ASK ABOUT MEASUREMENT AND EVALUATION

- **What is the purpose of the community change initiative?** Is it to change the lives of individuals, to establish structures that improve a community's networks and services, or both? If both, what is the nature of the relationship between the two (Coulton, in Fiester 1998)?
- **What is the purpose of the evaluation?** Is it to learn whether anticipated outcomes were achieved; to provide data that may increase chances for success; to lift up community voices and build new knowledge among residents?
- **Who is the audience for the evaluation?** How will these people learn about or from evaluation findings?
- **What type of relationship do you hope to forge** between the evaluators and those being evaluated?
- **What measurement tools or methods** best capture the ever-changing nature of the initiative?
- **What community indicators do you need** to tell you about the people and conditions of the neighborhood, and to help you monitor change over time?
- **How will you demonstrate whether the CCI's strategies show promise,** not just in the short term but with increasing impact over time?

#### *Clarity of Purpose*

Never underestimate the power of evaluation to shape a community change initiative. People design or adapt their work to meet the challenges of evaluation, much as schools teach to the standardized tests used to judge student performance. Don't let this be an unintended consequence of your CCI's evaluation. Think carefully about the purpose of evaluation and communicate it clearly to all stakeholders.

What might the purpose of evaluation be? **Traditional evaluation** tries to show whether an initiative achieved its anticipated outcomes. **Formative evaluation** seeks to reveal what people could do differently or better to achieve their intended outcomes. And **transformative evaluation** aims to produce social change. It uses the evaluation process to build stakeholders' knowledge, and it lifts up the voices of people who are most affected by community conditions (Jordan 2003).

These purposes are not mutually exclusive. An evaluation can simultaneously measure outcomes, improve people's ability to make good judgments, and lift up new voices and new leaders. In fact, we believe a CCI evaluation *should* aspire to all three. The important point, however, is to know what the primary purpose is before designing the evaluation.

## COMPARISON OF THREE APPROACHES TO RESEARCH AND EVALUATION OF COMMUNITY CHANGE INITIATIVES

ITEM OF COMPARISON	TRADITIONAL RESEARCH/ EVALUATION	COMMUNITY-BASED RESEARCH/EVALUATION	COMMUNITY-DRIVEN RESEARCH/EVALUATION
<b>Who chooses the research topic?</b>	Evaluation experts or funders	Evaluators and funders, in partnership with community	Community members, with support from researchers
<b>What is the goal of research/evaluation?</b>	To advance scientific knowledge	To advance the researcher's knowledge and the community's use of knowledge	To contribute to community learning, self-determination, and advocacy
<b>What role does the researcher/evaluator play?</b>	External, objective expert	Collaborator and partner of community	Employee (literally or figuratively) of the community
<b>What roles do residents/community stakeholders play?</b>	Subjects of research; relationships between evaluator and community are discouraged to avoid bias or loss of objectivity	Partners in decision making; subjects of research	Lead decision-makers, with responsibility for research/evaluation priorities, process, and use of results
<b>How does the research/evaluation relate to prior research?</b>	Builds on established, peer-reviewed academic research	Builds on established knowledge but welcomes new questions relevant to the community	Uses prior research only if relevant to the community Tries to supplement, not duplicate, prior research in communities that have been "studied to death"
<b>Who benefits financially?</b>	Evaluator/researcher, who receives wages or contract	Researcher; funds may also be available to encourage community participation	Community members; those who collect data receive stipends or wages, and those who provide information receive financial incentives
<b>Does it address barriers to community participation?</b>	Not unless they interfere with data collection	Only during the early stages of selecting a research topic and planning the research process	Yes, at all stages from research design to data use; evaluation can't go forward without full community participation
<b>Does it build skills among community members?</b>	That is not a goal or priority; concerns about objectivity can preclude community members from collecting data	Builds researcher's skill in working with community, not resident's own research skills	Builds community capacity throughout the process, leaving residents better equipped to collect, analyze, and use data
<b>Who is the audience?</b>	The scientific community and funders; community stakeholders rarely see research results	It depends on the project; may include policymakers, community organizations, community members, or the clients served by organizations	Community leaders, residents, and all stakeholders reflected in the research
<b>Who owns the data and research instruments?</b>	Researcher/evaluator or funder	Evaluator and community share ownership or are free to use data as they each see fit	Community owns all rights to data and controls how the data are used and disseminated

*Source: Adapted from materials by the Community Learning Network, 2003*

Figure 4

## TIPS FOR MEASUREMENT AND EVALUATION

- Identify power imbalances (e.g., between funders and residents) at the start of the evaluation and throughout the process. Acknowledge the issues and commit to struggling through them, even if they create discomfort among participants.
- Recognize and respond to power issues in the evaluation, from the way questions are phrased to the way findings are interpreted and communicated.
- Have all stakeholders agree, at the beginning, on how they will participate in the evaluation, what they want to learn from it, when and in what form they want the data, who will receive the data, and how they will use the data.
- Establish an evaluation team whose members are diverse in terms of economic class as well as race/ethnicity.
- Create a process for checking on perceptions, attitudes, and behaviors among participants.
- Regularly share information about the evaluation and data with the community.
- Rely on the wisdom of community members when identifying and defining outcomes to measure.
- Be realistic about the amount of time it takes to see evidence of outcomes. Plan to capture short- and long-term results.

— Adapted from the National Funding Collaborative on Violence Prevention

### *Relationship between Evaluation Funders and Subjects*

Evaluation often is imposed, required, and even managed by an entity outside the initiative and community. Typically, that entity is the initiative's funder. Yet, despite the huge role that funders (especially foundations) play in crafting and supervising CCIs, evaluations rarely assess their role. Instead, they tend to focus on the community groups or agencies that implement CCI strategies.

When funders are exempt from evaluation, some nagging questions arise. Are the results accurate or biased? Has the truth been negotiated in ways that undermine what we can learn? Have crucial factors been omitted from the analysis?

More doubts surface when the funder of the initiative also pays for its evaluation, which frequently happens. A funder's urge to find early evidence of success can quash the innovation that is so necessary for meaningful long-term change. CCI participants can be tempted to realign programs and strategies so they produce short-term, easily measurable changes, and they turn away from strategies that are promising but unproven or risky. Such decisions jeopardize their ability to learn from and adapt the initiative and to produce meaningful, sustainable results.

### *Relationship between Evaluators and Community*

Traditional research doesn't do much to improve relationships between evaluation funders and subjects. But **participatory action research**, also called **empowerment evaluation**, does. It builds the capacity of residents and

community stakeholders to be equals in the evaluation process, not merely subjects.

The concept of empowerment evaluation spans a continuum from limited participation to full control of the evaluation. At one end is **community-based research**, in which evaluators and other experts collaborate with community stakeholders. At the other end is **community-driven evaluation**, in which evaluators are in service to community members who lead the work. Figure 4 compares traditional, community-based, and community-driven research on several dimensions.

### *Credentialing Community Wisdom*

Community wisdom is the information people gain by experiencing life. Because community members are not considered "experts" and because the information is collected through qualitative methods, many people view community wisdom as less credible and less valuable than other

forms of evaluation data. The lack of respect for community wisdom increases when it comes to analyzing data and extracting meaning. Neighborhood residents (especially in low-income communities of color) are excluded from this process, because they are viewed merely as data providers and consumers. When this happens, the CCI is the real loser.

A primary function of evaluation is to help people understand complex systems so they can make decisions and take actions to improve the systems. And a primary way to make those decisions is through the learning, both individual and collective, that occurs as community members select, build, and use data themselves.

*The term “evaluation” comes from a Latin word meaning to strengthen or empower.*

*Today, however, most people use the word to refer to numerical measurement (Smith 2002a). We prefer using it to signify the means to learning and action, rather than an end in itself.*

## **GROWING ROOTS . . . STRENGTHENING NEIGHBOURHOODS: HOW A COMMUNITY FOUNDATION LEARNS FROM EVALUATION**

The Hamilton Community Foundation (HCF), located in Hamilton, Ontario, recently began working to strengthen neighborhoods, foster leadership, and build capacity among local networks and grassroots organizations. HCF's *Growing Roots . . . Strengthening Neighbourhoods Program* began in 2003 as a 5-year pilot project to help residents of four challenged neighborhoods identify and implement projects to improve their quality of life.

The project adopted a community development approach, positioning evaluation as a way to enhance participation, dialogue, and action. The evaluation consisted of:

- 1 Deepening residents' understanding of neighborhood strengths through a participatory process of mapping assets.** In community meetings, residents discussed the assets they had identified and revised the maps. Using Geographic Information System software, the program produced digital maps of assets, integrated them with demographic data, and presented them to the community.
- 2. Evaluating the outcomes and achievements of neighborhood residents, in their own voices.** “Photovoice,” a combination of photography and storytelling, elicited stories and narrative data from neighborhood children, youth, and adults and recorded their responses to evaluation questions.

- 3. Publicly presenting and discussing evaluation findings.** The program coordinator integrated findings from the assets-mapping process, statistical information about program participants and activities, mini-evaluations done by group projects, and Photovoice images and stories, which they presented to residents, the Neighbourhoods Program Advisory Committee, Hamilton Community Foundation staff and board members, and other community members. The public forum enabled stakeholders to discuss lessons learned, hear suggestions for improvement, propose solutions, and validate the findings. Participants also received a summary of evaluation findings and a newsletter with photos and stories from each neighborhood.

Hamilton Community Foundation's evaluation approach has significant advantages. It grounds the evaluation process in the experiences and viewpoints of neighborhood residents and neighborhood groups. It generates feedback from residents and community groups, which strengthens the foundation's program planning and grant making. It informs HCF's policies and strategies for neighborhood strengthening, and it improves staff members' understanding of how to support community development effectively.

— Adapted from Love and Muggah (2005)

#### 4. CREATING KNOWLEDGE

Traditionalists view learning as an individual act, one that can occur in any number of private places but almost always outside a community. That view encourages a hierarchy or competition between people who have “legitimate” (credentialed) knowledge and those who do not. Thus dominant views remain dominant; the power imbalance within poor communities persists; and culture, collective action, and interdependence are excluded from the learning process.



But we believe the path from *information* to *knowledge* begins long before a person receives the information; it begins with one’s own experience. We test new information against our experiences and by interacting with others. Knowledge grows from the combination of objective information and lived reality.

In community change initiatives, “knowledge building”—efforts to create a shared understanding of results and what it takes to achieve them—is important, because when many people hold knowledge it tends to be used in richer and more varied ways. For that reason, CCIs strive to create a **learning community**, one that is aware of its resources, skills, and knowledge and shares them openly (Falk and Harrison 1998).

In CCIs, we value collective learning through **reflection** and **dialogue**. We seek the broad and intentional **dispersal** of information and knowledge. We validate common-sense wisdom gleaned from community experiences as well as scientific research. We view learning as a co-creative process in which groups of people adopt, adapt, and invent strategies and solutions. And we seek to link learning and actions to results. (See figure 5.)

*True knowledge is only gained through reflection and dialogue. Reflection is personal; dialogue occurs in a group. The shift from the personal to the collective experience, and the process of getting there, are essential to the acquisition, sharing, and use of new knowledge.*

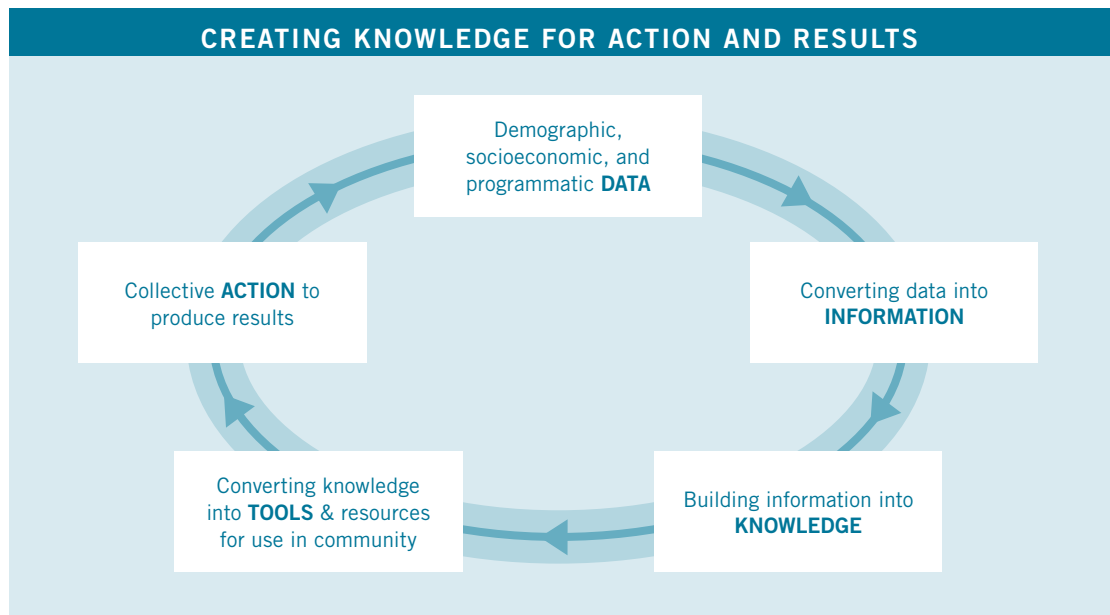


Figure 5

### *Reflection*

It is said that 70 percent to 80 percent of knowledge is perception. Our perceptions are shaped by our experience, our interpretation of that experience, and our image of a better future.

Reflection is the tool we use to recognize and examine our perceptions. Every moment of every day, we unconsciously synthesize information according to our perceptions of the past and future. The trick is to *consciously* understand our own experiences, our motivations, and our view of what is going on around us and then consciously compare that to the experiences, motivations, and views of others.

### *Dialogue*

Dialogue is not an end product. It is a process, a mutual exchange that furthers group reflection, learning, and action. Dialogue leads you to your next step. It is a bridge, an exploration, a form of movement. It enhances the sense of community and increases the likelihood that people will do things for each other.

Dialogue is purposeful, up-front, and personal. Unlike ordinary communication, dialogue doesn't occur at a distance and it isn't done "to" someone. Unlike typical conversation, the purpose of dialogue is not to promote one's own view above all others. The purpose is to reveal the incoherence or weakness in all of our thinking and to create a shared consciousness (Smith 2003). The dialogue process seeks challenge and growth. It thrives on critical thinking. And it leads, ideally, to new beliefs and actions.

The following points about dialogue are relevant to community change initiatives:

- **Dialogue can be unproductive or even damaging if vast differences in power give some people knowledge or skills that place them above other participants.** People don't come to conversations on an equal footing. They come with histories and identities that are deeply inscribed by social pressures, expectations, and biases. Egalitarian relationships aren't necessary for productive dialogue, but some sort of reciprocity is (Smith 2003b).
- **Dialogue is an outgrowth of relationships.** As the relationships grow, so will the power of dialogue. It will increasingly help people incorporate learning into their actions and into the initiative's strategies.

## QUESTIONS TO ASK DURING A REFLECTIVE SESSION OR DIALOGUE

- In what way is the community changing?
- Which problems were caused by the changes, and which have always existed?
- How is our community being affected by factors that seem out of our control?
- How is our community affecting other people's lives?
- Who knows about our community, and what do they know?
- Who else shares our problems or has similar ones?
- What are our hopes and aspirations for this community?

After you have reflected on and discussed these basic questions, think about how the knowledge can help you move forward:

- What new knowledge was or can be created from the conversation?
- Who needs this knowledge, and how will we make sure it reaches those people or organizations?
- How can we ensure time and space for continuing reflection and dialogue about what we are learning?
- How will we know whether the knowledge improves the community initiative? How will we know whether it improves individual lives?

— Adapted from Dudley and Imbach (1997)

## TIPS FOR CREATING KNOWLEDGE

- Use a facilitator (at least during the early stages of dialogue) to keep the big picture in mind, identify sticking points, and equalize the playing field (Smith 2003).
- Use conversation to stimulate personal reflection and generate dialogue within groups of CCI participants and stakeholders.
- Encourage dialogue participants to suspend their assumptions and to view each other as colleagues or peers.
- Understand the influence that race, culture, class, and gender have on how learning occurs and how it is experienced.
- Create an infrastructure for learning. Intentionally set aside space for dialogue and practice, so progressive ideas have a better chance of finding their way into mainstream community life. Provide time and resources for reflection; write down and disseminate the ideas that surface.
- Use story circles (see “Tips for Developing a Common Vision,” at the beginning of this chapter) to advance group reflection and dialogue.
- Help CCI participants and stakeholders acquire the ability and opportunity to reflect and to recognize change (or the need for change).

- **Dialogue is fueled by information**, facts, common aspirations, and common experiences.
- **Dialogue is about collectively and cooperatively taking actions to improve the world.** Paulo Freire (1970) wrote that dialogue enables people to create new understandings, which encourage disenfranchised people to reject their passive role and to take charge of their own destiny. He was right.

### *Dispersing Information and Knowledge*

We all know that knowledge is power and that widely held knowledge often is the first step toward widely held power. Another way of looking at it is to say that people learn democracy by being members of a group or community that acts democratically—a community in which everyone, not just a few elites, have knowledge, “own” it, and use it to hold each other accountable.

To be widely owned, knowledge has to be widely shared. Initiatives that try to spread power more equally in a community without a strategy for dispersing knowledge virtually guarantee that the power will shift again to a handful of people—albeit different ones—who act for, rather than with, the community. But it isn’t enough just to share information. For information to produce knowledge, people must talk about

and validate the information, reflect on its implications for themselves and community, and seek appropriate solutions in context.

Unfortunately, both information and knowledge tend to be controlled by a few people or groups that reside outside low-income communities. These may be policymakers, researchers, foundations, or others—people who are accustomed to speaking for the community, to having information at their fingertips, to wielding resources and making things happen. By intentionally dispersing information and knowledge, CCIs build knowledge and help protect against the abuse of power (whether intentional or unwitting). Websites, neighborhood newsletters, local radio or TV shows, and other media that serve the community are important vehicles for broadly sharing information about a community and its issues.

There are several ways that knowledge, when shared broadly, leads to community action.

Knowledge about a community problem, such as the discovery of high levels of arsenic or lead, can spark community dialogue and collective action. Information about an innovative solution, a new law, or a policy revised to address

*“If you always do what you’ve always done,  
you’ll always get what you’ve always got.”*

— Resident, *Making Connections*—Denver neighborhood



a common concern can prompt the community to act; so can the availability of new technology and mass media (Figueroa et al. 2002).

The extent to which one or more of these catalysts actually leads to action and results, however, depends on community members' awareness of the issue, and that depends on the extent to which there is a free and honest flow of knowledge without censoring, spinning, or watering down what people need to know.

## THE RACE AND DEMOCRACY REFLECTION PROJECT: KNOWLEDGE CREATION IN ACTION

The Center for Reflective Community Practice (CRCP), which developed the Race and Democracy Reflection Project, is devoted to building a more just and equitable society. CRCP does this by improving access to, and use of, knowledge acquired through on-the-ground efforts to make disenfranchised, low-income communities healthier and more vibrant places.

The project involved five grantee organizations of the Rockefeller Foundation's Race, Policy, and Democracy program in reflecting on and documenting lessons and critical questions drawn from their work. The participants were:

- **The Asian Pacific American Legal Center**, which works to empower the Asian Pacific Islander community and works across race to make systemic policy change
- **Beloved Community Center**, which models Dr. Martin Luther King Jr.'s vision for bringing together a critical mass of people trained to work inclusively and nonviolently
- **The Conservation Law Foundation Greater Boston Institute**, which advocates the use of law, economics, and science to solve environmental problems in New England
- **Southern Echo**, a leadership development, education, and training organization working to develop new grassroots leadership in the African-American communities of Mississippi and the surrounding region
- **Texas LEADS (Local Empowerment for Accessible and Diverse Schools)**, which fosters public engagement to address access and equity issues in state universities

CRCP worked with each organization separately to specify, capture, and examine lessons from their community work. Then CRCP convened the groups to find ways of sharing the knowledge so it could enrich their practice, educate other community workers, and inform public debate.

The reflection phase of the project concluded early in 2003, but CRCP and the organizations continued working to create a variety of tools, including a website and a digital library to share the knowledge generated by this project

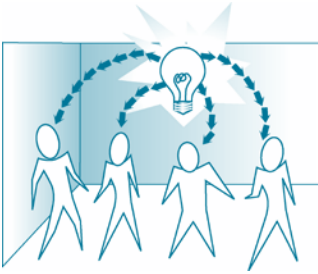
on the broader debate surrounding race and democracy in the United States. The tools were organized around a set of themes derived from the project, including these recommendations:

1. **Value and strengthen racial identity in constructing more effective cross-racial alliances.** When people connect with who they are, they can better connect with and understand what they share with others.
2. **Use a developmental process to strengthen and value racial identity.** Disenfranchised groups benefit from support and encouragement that builds confidence and self-esteem connected to their racial identity.
3. **Recognize the unique ways in which partners in multiracial work bring value to collaborations.** Each partner brings a different set of experiences, and therefore strengths, to the coalition work.
4. **Learn to interact productively in the face of difference.** Remember that differences in perspective arise from differences in experiences of social exclusion.
5. **Recognize the connection between acknowledging difference and finding common ground.** Particularly in the case of racial divisions, the experience of some groups is often unknown or misunderstood by others. Try to identify the experience that caused a specific viewpoint.
6. **Reinvent strategies for engaging racial difference.** Every coalition brings to its work a unique set of challenges related to racial difference. Strategies that worked in the past often need to be adjusted based on response to new issues, power dynamics, or stages of collaboration.

— Adapted from CRCP, *Vital Difference* (2003)

## 5. CREATING KNOWLEDGE-BASED TOOLS

Effective problem solving often requires people to invent a new tool for change—a better method, practice, relationship, or product. This process of creation is extremely powerful; it helps people come together, learn together, and act together (Kofman and Senge 1993).



We are not necessarily talking about starting from scratch or adopting a tool or model wholesale, even a successful one. Some of the most effective community creations are those that augment or adapt existing models, shaping them until they are uniquely suited for this community, this purpose, this time. The key is to aim for tools that position knowledge as a widely owned community resource; to invest in the creation process; and to create a structure for decision making, governance, and accountability that gives knowledge a home.

### *Knowledge as a Community Resource*

In order for the sequence of changes that we advocate to occur—data produces information, information produces knowledge, collective knowledge leads to better tools, and tools produce action and results—knowledge must be co-owned and used by a large number of community “experts.” The expert’s job is not just to know something himself or herself but to pass it along to others, who learn and help to create new knowledge. In this way, knowledge becomes a new community resource (sometimes called **learning capital**).

Learning capital is the usable product of collective learning. It is the ideas, methods, mentors, processes, information, technology, equipment, and other resources necessary to nourish people in communities as they pursue common interests. There are many different kinds of learning capital, including: opportunities for reflection, especially when organized and/or led by residents; new tools, especially when created by residents; neighborhood data, especially when collected by residents; neighborhood newsletters or websites, especially when written by residents.

CCIs can ensure that knowledge becomes a community resource by:

- **Protecting the right to learn but not the ownership of knowledge.** Data, knowledge, and skills are community property.
- **Spreading knowledge.** Share information and tools broadly and encourage active participation in the process. One of an initiative’s most important qualities is its ability to cultivate and share learning. Nobody benefits by hoarding knowledge and forcing others to reinvent the wheel.

### QUESTIONS TO ASK ABOUT CREATING KNOWLEDGE-BASED TOOLS

- On whom do you rely to lead your initiative’s learning process? How do you interact with that person or persons? What authority do they have?
- How will you apply new knowledge to the initiative’s activities? What structures or processes need to be in place to ensure that actions lead to the desired outcomes and that strategies keep improving?
- How will you disperse information and knowledge throughout the community and among all stakeholders?
- What needs to be adapted, adopted, or invented to support learning?
- How will you validate community wisdom and ensure that it has a place in planning and decision making?
- How and when will you revisit your theory of change to see if what you are learning necessitates changes? Who will be part of that process?
- What investments are needed to increase the community’s learning capital?

- **Keeping learning tied to the vision** created by community stakeholders and their partners, and to the results they select to guide and measure the work. Focus learning on the topics and issues that are most important—those that stand in the way of progress or results and those that might improve plans and actions.
- **Embedding learning capital in the community.** Collective learning can't occur on behalf of change agents; it has to involve the people most affected, working together to make their vision for change real.

### *Investing in the Creation of Tools*

Cec Ortiz, the founding site coordinator of *Making Connections*—Denver, often said, “A community that forgets how to learn dies.” Community change initiatives must invest in learning tools to achieve and sustain results. It is by learning that people solve problems, correct themselves when they get off track, and improve their programs and strategies.

CCIs convert knowledge into tools by:

- **Exploring what is known.** Collect and analyze everything available to you. Don't reject the learning of traditional “experts,” but also empower residents to question, critique, and challenge. The ability to challenge ideas is an essential step in forming one's ability to contribute and one's responsibility to question.
- **Investing in resident stakeholders' ability to adapt and invent their own solutions.** Community members know that old solutions and old knowledge haven't done the job; they live with the evidence of these failures every day. The opportunity to look within for their own answers is liberating.
- **Making opportunities for stakeholders to co-create solutions.** The process of group learning produces essential new tools, relationships, and will power.
- **Helping communities apply knowledge.** Knowing something is the beginning, not the end. Applying what we know helps communities move forward and continue the learning process.

### TIPS FOR CREATING KNOWLEDGE-BASED TOOLS

- Intentionally create physical and psychological space where people feel safe to experiment, disagree, reflect, and learn.
- Identify the ideas, methods, mentors, processes, information, technology, equipment, and other resources necessary to nourish groups or “communities” of people who share a common interest, activity, or type of work.
- Develop new ways to legitimize community knowledge and wisdom.
- Embrace cultural models of learning, such as oral traditions, Native Americans' “sacred places,” popular education models, and teaching by members of one's own ethnic community.
- Give community members opportunities to create their own solutions and knowledge.
- Make it the norm for community members to challenge and question data, “experts,” and proposed changes.
- Enforce the assumption that all data, tools, and skills are co-owned by the community. Develop plans for how data, learning tools, and skills will be shared broadly in the community.
- Empower community members to call for more learning or for changes in action and to see this as their role.
- Create routine opportunities to revisit the initiative's theory of change, strategies, and processes to see if they still are likely to produce meaningful, lasting results.

- **Recognizing that the process of creation is never done.** Everything is always subject to adaptation, improvement, and new inventions. In fact, the biggest complement is not when a model, tool, or method is adopted but when it is *adapted* to meet new needs and environments.

## LAWRENCE COMMUNITY WORKS' NEIGHBORCIRCLES: A KNOWLEDGE-BASED TOOL IN ACTION

Lawrence Community Works, Inc. (LCW) is a community development corporation with an entrepreneurial spirit that empowers residents to revitalize neighborhoods in Lawrence, Massachusetts. LCW takes a multipronged approach to neighborhood revitalization, rooted in community organizing and emphasizing investment in both people and places. With help from more than 1,000 members, LCW creates housing, parks, community facilities, and educational and leadership opportunities for youth and families.

A vacuum of energy, vision, and leadership in Lawrence's public life left the city unable to adapt to economic and demographic changes. LCW's response was to organize networks that connect people to each other and to opportunities for participation in civic life—from neighborhood groups to the City Council—in a way that feels safe, fun, and productive. This approach is a hybrid of many community organizing practices with the added element of network theory—a set of ideas from technology and economics that are useful for understanding and shaping community environments. Applying network theory to community work has helped LCW challenge some common obstacles to genuine engagement and shaped a strong “demand environment” for change.

The demand environment concept is central to network organizing, which values inclusive, democratic deliberation and decision making. It focuses efforts and investments on the community's capacity to produce demand, by providing abundant opportunities for people to come together, articulate, and act on those things that matter to them. One example is **NeighborCircles**.

Here's how they work: Under the leadership of a resident “host” and trained community facilitator, 8 to 10 families meet 3 times over the course of a month for dinner and

conversation. They get to know each other, talk about the neighborhood or city, and decide if there is something that they can do together to help build community.

The purpose of NeighborCircles is to:

- conduct outreach that helps LCW identify new activists and leaders;
- help neighbors, or other interested stakeholders, get to know each other and have productive, informative discussions about a range of issues, concerns, hopes, and experiences that shape their quality of life;
- stimulate local and citywide activism and mobilization;
- train and support residents' facilitative leadership skills and other skills needed to lead community change; and
- inform an ever-widening group of residents about LCW efforts and programs and involve as many people as possible as members and leaders in LCW's work.

NeighborCircles are self-determined. Some never coalesce beyond the initial three-meeting stage. Some organize a small project and then disband; some continue meeting and regularly address local issues, such as garbage collection or snow plowing. A NeighborCircle that chooses to address an issue identified by its members may become a Property Improvement Committee (PIC) and work with LCW staff on large-scale projects, such as an affordable housing development or a local park.

### **For more information, contact:**

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## CONCLUSION:

### Using the Framework

Traditional models of change begin with a hypothesis and then conduct scientific enquiry, collect evidence, prove what works, and apply the solution in practice. Models based on practice, however, derive and invent theories from the act of *doing*. In these models, we assume our theories are incomplete and we expect to build alternative ones as we learn along the way.



Still, tradition exerts a strong pressure. It's hard to break free of approaches that are ineffective but familiar—especially when people feel fearful or overwhelmed, as they often do when trying to improve community outcomes. How do we resolve our attraction to known strategies with the need for new and better ones? The answer is to embrace both, and we offer these concluding thoughts as guidelines.

#### ACTION AND LEARNING ARE INSEPARABLE

The *Framework for Learning and Results* draws from the concepts of chaos, complexity, and systems thinking, and from the pivotal role of reflection and feedback in community change efforts, to suggest that action and learning are deeply entwined. What we advocate is *praxis*—action based on reflection.

Praxis requires us to simultaneously look forward (inventing new processes and models) and backward (recognizing past failures but honoring and retaining our history and culture). Our knowledge grows from this constant interplay of past and future, thought and action.

Margaret Wheatley (1999) warns us not to value planning more than strategic thinking. She contends that *predicting* is less important than *reacting*. We agree, with one caveat: If we completely disregard the role of prediction we will end up right back where we came from, immobilized by the fear of failure. Planning, predicting, and strategic thinking are all necessary for moving from learning to action.

#### ADOPT, ADAPT, AND INVENT

We apply knowledge to practice by adapting what we do—its scale, scope, and substance—and how we do it (the process by which we organize, govern, and relate to one another). But adaptation, by itself, is not enough to produce real change. To adapt something is to adjust it, to fix it, to make it fit a new situation or use. As Wheatley writes, “[T]he work is not to fix. . . . [S]upport needs to be given to radically different processes and methods, new systems based on new assumptions. The work becomes not process improvement but process revolution.”

*“Once social change begins, it cannot be reversed. You cannot un-educate the person who has learned to read. You cannot humiliate the person who feels pride. You cannot oppress the people who are not afraid anymore.”*

— César Chávez

The revolutionary change Wheatley describes comes from a constant, iterative process of adoption, adaptation, and invention:

- **Adopted** practices can be acquired from many sources. They are owned by the people with power to act on the knowledge. They must be experienced, not simply read about or described, in order to take root.
- **Adapted** practices are tweaked to fit a specific environment or need. They can be acquired from outside sources or created within the community. Like adopted practices, they must be owned by those with power to act.

*Albert Einstein said that no problem can be solved by the same consciousness that created it. We must assume our work is not to replicate but to adapt, innovate, and invent.*

- **Invented** practices are created collectively. They are owned by those with power to act, but they also are shared broadly so that other community members can use them. The invention has to come from within the initiative; in most cases, outside experts simply do not have the insights needed to significantly improve the strategies.

Often, it takes all three steps to convert knowledge into tools and action. The theory or plan for change, in particular, should frequently be expanded or deepened to incorporate feedback and lessons from experience about what it takes to achieve meaningful and sustainable change. A theory of change that doesn't adapt becomes obsolete, and therefore unable to contribute to change. When that happens, it is our obligation to figure out whether the theory can and should be fixed or whether we should help it die. After all, sheer power can keep an idea alive beyond its ability to contribute—and when community change becomes more about power than about results, we have a problem.

### **DON'T FORGET THE CHANGE AGENTS**

Agents of change are themselves an important factor in the change process. CCIs require a critical mass of people who are willing to learn and adapt, will apply what they learn quickly, can imagine alternatives (for the community and themselves), and are willing and able to co-create and co-own the changes.

Change agents need authority to commit to actions (or be able to get it). They must spread information and knowledge within the community. They must accept and respond to feedback, and they must deliver on expectations.

Not everyone comes to this work with the same gifts or abilities. Some are immediately ready to change and be changed; some are willing but not ready; some need to be convinced; and others are unwilling but needed because of their status or history in the community. To some people, change feels new, fresh, a break from what is routine or stultifying. To others, change feels disrespectful, disloyal, and unsafe. Ultimately, therefore, adaptation and growth are not only about changing circumstances but about changing people.

## STAY ACCOUNTABLE FOR RESULTS

To what and to whom is a CCI publicly accountable?

- To the social contract—the covenant with the community that addresses behavior, values, and roles, especially regarding inclusiveness and power
- To the theory (plan) for change
- To the desired long-term results
- To learning from public disclosure about actions and consequences
- To the transfer of leadership, knowledge, and skills by enlarging the circle of leaders
- To an open, honest relationship with the community

Therefore, as partners move through the continuum from creating a vision to becoming a learning community, they need intentional opportunities to reflect on what they are doing, how they are doing it, and what it means for the community.

Remember: What happens below the surface, with the essential conditions for change, is as important as what happens above it with the essential elements of learning. So it isn't enough to be accountable for results; CCI participants also need to understand how actions, learning, and results are interrelated—as this framework tries to show.

This framework is a work in progress. It is intended not as a starting point but as a tool for use at any point in the learning process. Add to it whatever you know, and make it your own.

Our goal for this paper is to call attention to the vital link between (a) intentionally reflecting on the role of learning and (b) achieving results. We also want readers to appreciate the value of the collective good (not merely individual gain), to recognize the role of “community” in CCIs, and to see the need for new ways of forming and expressing democratic values.

Now, we urge you to talk with others in your community about these issues. Take time to reflect on the questions that are crucial for your initiative's success. Don't let the initiative happen to you; *make it happen*. Create the moments in which change occurs. Discover and build evidence to support new forms of practice. Lift up new knowledge, new insights, new practice, and new learning.

The framework also is a step in our own learning journey. We invite your feedback, your ideas, your tools and strategies. Developing the framework has been a humbling experience; so much of what we thought we knew turned out to be incomplete, unenlightened, or just plain wrong. We persisted because we believe we must dismantle our sense of who we are, what we know, and what we have to offer before we can create better, experience-based tools and knowledge for the work of transforming ourselves and the communities we care about.

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