

# The Foundation Review

a publication of the Dorothy A. Johnson Center for Philanthropy at Grand Valley State University

---

Volume 5  
Issue 1 *Open Access*

---

2013

## Only Connect: How an Investment in Relationships Among Social Change Leaders Is Changing Them, Their Organizations, and Their City

Stefan Lanfer  
*Barr Foundation*

Patricia Brandes  
*Barr Foundation*

Claire Reinelt  
*Leadership Learning Community*

Follow this and additional works at: <https://scholarworks.gvsu.edu/tfr>



Part of the [Nonprofit Administration and Management Commons](#), and the [Public Affairs, Public Policy and Public Administration Commons](#)

---

### Recommended Citation

Lanfer, S., Brandes, P., & Reinelt, C. (2013). Only Connect: How an Investment in Relationships Among Social Change Leaders Is Changing Them, Their Organizations, and Their City. *The Foundation Review*, 5(1). <https://doi.org/10.4087/FOUNDATIONREVIEW-D-12-00028.1>

Copyright © 2013 Dorothy A. Johnson Center for Philanthropy at Grand Valley State University. The Foundation Review is reproduced electronically by ScholarWorks@GVSU. <https://scholarworks.gvsu.edu/tfr>

# Only Connect: How an Investment in Relationships Among Social Change Leaders Is Changing Them, Their Organizations, and Their City

Stefan Lanfer, M.B.A., and Patricia Brandes, M.B.A., Barr Foundation;  
and Claire Reinelt, Ph.D., Leadership Learning Community

*Keywords:* Networks, social capital, emergence, connectivity, Barr Fellowship, Barr Foundation, Boston, sabbaticals, disruption, fellowships, nonprofit leadership

## Introduction

What would it take to create a vibrant, just, and sustainable world with hopeful futures for children? That is the vision guiding the Boston-based Barr Foundation. Like many such vision statements, this one may provoke cynicism as easily as it inspires hope. Despite the best efforts of many, the challenges we are focused on in the social sector persist. Quite a few are getting worse – climate change, struggling schools, opportunity gaps, and a growing sense of hopelessness as we lose faith in our civic institutions and elected leaders. The problems are complex. The obstacles are many. And the pathways to change are unclear. More and bigger nonprofits have not resolved the dilemma. Neither have more and bigger foundations.

And so there is a lively debate in our sector about effectiveness, what it means to be “outcomes focused,” and how we can move beyond the organization as the unit of action to achieve large-scale impact. There is a hunger to rewrite the familiar story of isolated gains failing to deliver systemic change. Yet the debate typically glosses over a vital ingredient of lasting change – people.

People, not organizations, are the agents of positive change. People advocate and act for greater justice, equity, peace, and sustainability. People activate powerful networks and collaborate to benefit whole communities. Yet, we have not focused enough on how best to support these

## Key Points

- After years of leading social-sector organizations in an environment where competition is more the norm than collaboration, many gifted leaders are near burnout, unable to maximize their gifts. Since 2005, the Barr Fellowship has been changing that in Boston.
- This network of leaders, created by the Barr Foundation, is based on the hypothesis that recognizing talented leaders and investing in their personal growth and connections with one another will result in individual, collective, and city transformation.
- A longtime funder of networks, Barr designed the fellowship as a “connectivity” network, where collective actions and shared agendas might emerge but would not be imposed. In this way, the fellowship exemplifies what has been described as “ambidextrous philanthropy” – rooted in strategy yet also in values; focused on outcomes, yet also responsive.
- This article describes the theory of change; strategy; evaluation methodology (including network mapping); results – for Barr Fellows, their organizations, and Boston; and how the program fits within an approach to philanthropy that embraces the long view. It discusses implications for funders interested in supporting connectivity networks.

change agents – at least not in all the right ways. While much attention is paid to things like talent pipelines, performance metrics, and career ladders, the leadership discussion does not typically



Barr Fellows alumni learning journey to Haiti, March 2012.

address how to help dedicated change agents rejuvenate and connect with peers in ways that deepen their individual and collective impact.

This article steps into that gap. It offers the hypothesis that change agents can be rejuvenated and inspired and great collaborations sparked by the same thing – social capital. This hypothesis is being tested in Boston in the form of the Barr Fellowship. Launched in 2005 by the Barr Foundation, the fellowship includes a three-month sabbatical, group travel to the global south (South Africa, Zimbabwe, Brazil, and Haiti, for example), and the opportunity to join a remarkably diverse network. A Barr Fellowship recognizes past contributions. It is also a long-term investment in fellows' relationships with one another, even without set expectations or requirements about what is to emerge. What has resulted, however, is something *The Boston Globe* once called a “web of collaboration that is rippling through Boston’s nonprofit community with increasing effect” (Ailworth, 2010), and what a *Stanford Social Innovation Review* case study described as “the

force behind an unexpected series of cooperative efforts among leaders of local nonprofits” (Goldenharr & Hughes, 2012, p. 67).

After seven years and four classes of 12 fellows each, the Barr Fellowship has created a network that is a remarkable cross-section of Boston. Its members are diverse in age, race, sector, geographic focus, and other ways. Few knew one another before being inducted as fellows. The few exceptions were those who knew each other from opposite ends of pitched battles over neighborhood projects, funding, or politics. Now, they know and trust each other deeply, and Boston is reaping the benefits of their boundary-crossing collaborations. To cite just a few examples, there were Barr Fellows behind the scenes at two innovative in-district charter schools in Boston that opened their doors in fall 2012 (the Dudley Street Neighborhood Charter School and the Margarita Muñoz Academy); there were fellows behind a community garden that opened in the Bromley-Heath Public Housing Project in 2011; and there are fellows on both sides of the table of Boston’s

District-Charter Compact – a new effort to bridge the long-impenetrable divide between charter and traditional district public schools and find common ground that benefits all of Boston’s children.

This article explores the power of social capital. It is about network theory put into practice. And it is about an outcomes- and strategy-focused foundation making the decision in one important case to hold lightly to outcomes, and instead to trust in network theory and the power of emergence. This article begins by placing the Barr Fellowship squarely amid recent debates about philanthropic effectiveness and collaborative action. It follows with a discussion of the fellowship’s origins, theory, design, and evaluation methodology. It closes with a discussion of results and advice to other funders and program designers interested in this approach.

But first, another example of how this unique investment in relationships is changing the character of social change work in Boston: During the 2008 presidential campaign, Barack Obama pledged to replicate the Harlem Children’s Zone. In 2010, this became the Promise Neighborhoods initiative – a competitive grant program to design comprehensive approaches for the education and developmental needs of children in distressed communities. When this was announced, several Boston organizations began positioning themselves as lead applicant. Many feared, however, that if Boston produced competing applications, success was unlikely. In the end, one organization emerged as lead – the Dudley Street Neighborhood Initiative, headed by 2007 Barr Fellow John Barros. He described how this happened:

If it weren’t for the Barr Fellowship, I don’t know how we would have negotiated a single Boston application. There were some difficult conversations that we could get through because of the relationships, the trust, and the social capital we built. (Barr Foundation, 2011)

Liz O’Connor, a Boston-based consultant supporting the project, added additional color to what those difficult conversations entailed:

It meant John was able to say to people, “I can’t have a transactional conversation with you about how much money you’re going to get once I get this grant. That’s not how I do business. And somehow, we as people who care about each other are not going to do business like that either.” Amazingly, people accepted that. I’ve never seen that before in this town. (Barr Foundation, 2011)

Boston’s initial application joined 300 others from 48 states. Of the 21 invited to submit full proposals, Boston’s was one of only three to receive a perfect score, earning the city a planning grant to develop a full proposal.

Hopes ran high as the team got to work on a full proposal for what was by then being called the Boston Promise Initiative. Given the positive response to the initial application, many were surprised and discouraged when Boston’s full proposal was not among those chosen for the first round of implementation grants. Faced with this setback, many similar efforts may have disbanded. Yet, in Boston, the strength of the relationships underlying the effort propelled the work forward. One example is the fall 2012 opening of a new school in the Boston Promise neighborhood – the Dudley Street Neighborhood Charter School – a vision made real by Barros, several other fellows, and many others working together behind the scenes.

In December 2012, the Boston Promise Initiative was selected as one of seven new sites to receive Promise Neighborhoods implementation grants (U.S. Department of Education, 2012).

### **An ‘Ambidextrous’ Approach to Collective Impact**

In the pages of *The Foundation Review*, Paul Connelly of the TCC Group introduced two schools of thought on philanthropy: the “technocratic” and the “humanistic” (Connelly, 2011). Connelly asserted that technocratic philanthropy (more commonly referred to as strategic or outcomes-focused philanthropy) “typically involves experts applying business principles to help foundations define their goals clearly, devise focused strategies, measure results rigorously, and engage with



Barr Fellows John Barros and Sister Margaret.

grantees to increase impact” (p. 121). In short, it is philanthropy as science and is typically cast in contrast to philanthropy as art – what Connelly termed “humanistic” philanthropy, which is more “values, passion driven,” “responsive,” and “opportunistic.” While noting that each approach has its vocal advocates and detractors, Connelly then dismissed the either-or nature of the debate over which is more effective. Each approach has its distinctive strengths and limitations, he argued. Furthermore, in practice, most foundations’ activities lie on a continuum between the two approaches, not at either extreme. He closed by calling for more “ambidextrous” approaches that marry useful elements of both the humanistic and the technocratic.

Not long after Connelly’s piece appeared, John Kania and Mark Kramer (2011) of FSG published their article on “Collective Impact” in the *Stanford Social Innovation Review*. In it, they focused on the importance of cross-sector collaborations to address persistent social challenges. Examining successful cross-sector collaborations like Strive

in Cincinnati and Shape Up Somerville in Somerville, Mass., Kramer and Kania concluded that large-scale social change requires broad coalitions and five critical conditions: “a common agenda, shared measurement systems, mutually reinforcing activities, continuous communication, and backbone support organizations” (p.38).

While Kania and Kramer do urge funders to remain open about what strategies may come out of collective-impact initiatives, their framework, to apply Connelly’s analysis, is largely technocratic. It is anchored in a common agenda and in the methodical structuring of relationships and activities to execute against that agenda. What would a more “ambidextrous” approach to collective impact look like – one that is focused on creating the conditions for emergence rather than predetermined outcomes?

The Barr Fellowship is one example. On one hand, it looks technocratic. Its design was based on careful research into sabbatical and leadership programs as well as intensive interviews with

nonprofit leaders about what they needed. A detailed logic model makes explicit its core assumptions and theory of change for how an investment in a group of leaders and their relationships with one another will translate into positive impact on those leaders, their organizations, and their city. This logic model guides a rigorous evaluation process that has been embedded in the effort since it was launched.

The fellowship also exhibits clear humanistic qualities. It is anchored in and driven by values, passion, and intuition. Barr has never prescribed outcomes or specific collective actions. It has not insisted on a common agenda. Instead, it has focused on investing in and strengthening relationships. This is based on an early intuition that deep, personal connections of trust, respect, and even love would catalyze significant change. One fellow describes the fellowship this way:

The Barr Fellowship is an unprecedented network of people that in a lifetime most of us would never be able to pull together and become close to. We come from such diverse groups. Usually our interactions with each other are so professional and dry, and not very personal. This network transcends fields, gender, [and] race to a level that would not be doable on one's own. This level of partnership and camaraderie breaks down fears and inhibitions – it's going to save our sector.

### **The Origin of the Fellowship: A New Response to the 'Leadership Deficit'**

The impetus for the Barr Fellowship grew in part as a response to a series of reports raising alarms about an impending deficit in nonprofit leadership. Among the first was *Daring to Lead*<sup>1</sup>, from CompassPoint Nonprofit Services and the Meyer Foundation, in 2001. Based on a survey of more than 1,000 nonprofit executive directors, the report concluded that a majority would be retiring in the next five to 10 years. A 2006 Bridgespan report, "The Nonprofit Sector's Leadership Deficit" (Tierney, 2006), raised further alarm with projections that the nonprofit sector would need

to recruit and develop as many as 640,000 new senior managers over the next decade – 2.4 times the number employed in the sector at the time.

In response, Bridgespan and many others in the field called for a sharper focus on talent pipelines (including recruiting M.B.A.s and rising leaders from the business sector); others emphasized succession planning. The Barr Foundation, however, made different assumptions about the state of nonprofit leadership and the leadership gap – which led it to take a different approach.

Rather than focusing (in characteristically western fashion) on replacing our departing elders, Barr began to explore ways to help experienced leaders rejuvenate, reflect, and re-engage with their work at entirely new levels. Pat Brandes, who was Barr's senior advisor at the time, reached out to foundations (including Durfee and California Wellness) that were offering sabbaticals for nonprofit leaders to learn from their experiences. Having recently completed a sabbatical herself, Brandes interviewed leaders who had been on sabbaticals to compare notes. One observation by Marianne Hughes, then executive director of the Interaction Institute for Social Change, struck a chord. Despite finding her sabbatical to be personally rejuvenating and rewarding on many levels, Hughes said she regretted that she hadn't been able to have that experience together with colleagues or peers.

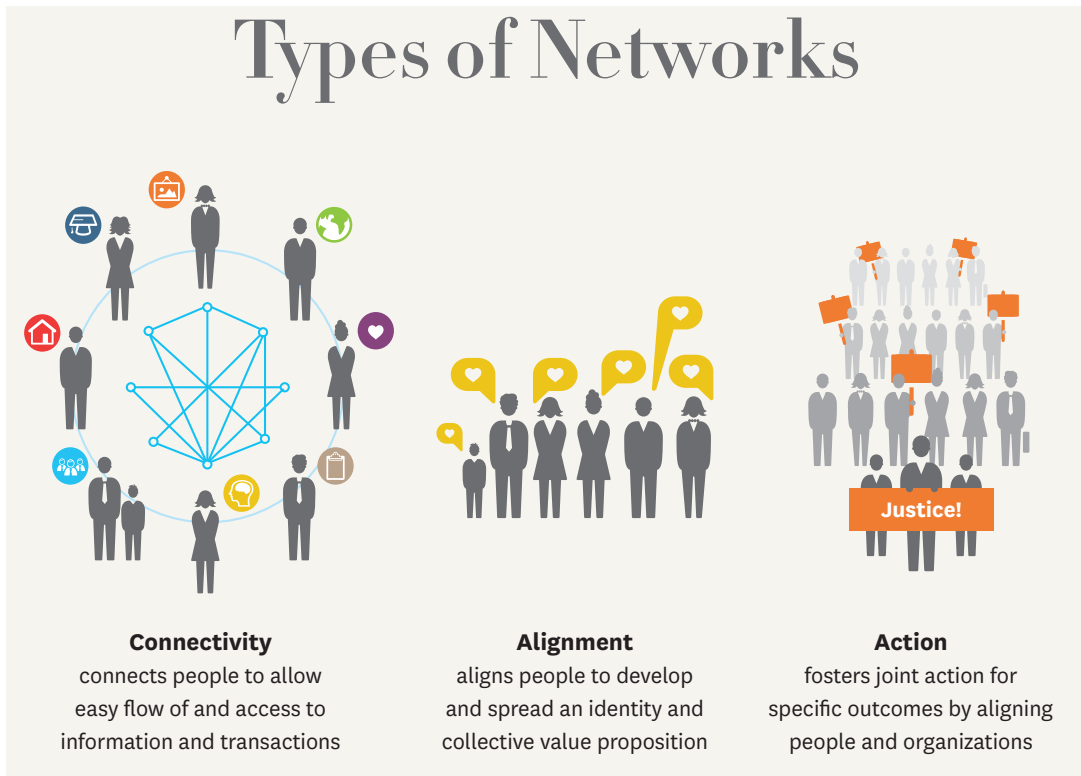
This reflection about connection as a missing piece of potential impact resonated for Brandes and her colleagues at Barr – especially Marion Kane, the foundation's first executive director. Brandes describes Kane's influence this way:

Marion was calling for philanthropy to move beyond making grants to individual organizations or programs. She brought a systems-thinking perspective and was highly influenced by writers such as Duncan Watts ("Six Degrees: The Science of the Connected Age") and Steve Johnson ("Emergence: The Connected Lives of Ants, Brains, Cities, and Software").

Brandes and Kane began to see the possibility of fostering a new kind of network in Boston and the

<sup>1</sup> "Daring to Lead" a joint project of the Meyer Foundation and CompassPoint Nonprofit Services (<http://www.compasspoint.org>).

FIGURE 1 Network Types



opportunity to put the theory about networks and emergence into practice.

### Network Theory and a Decision to Focus on Connectivity

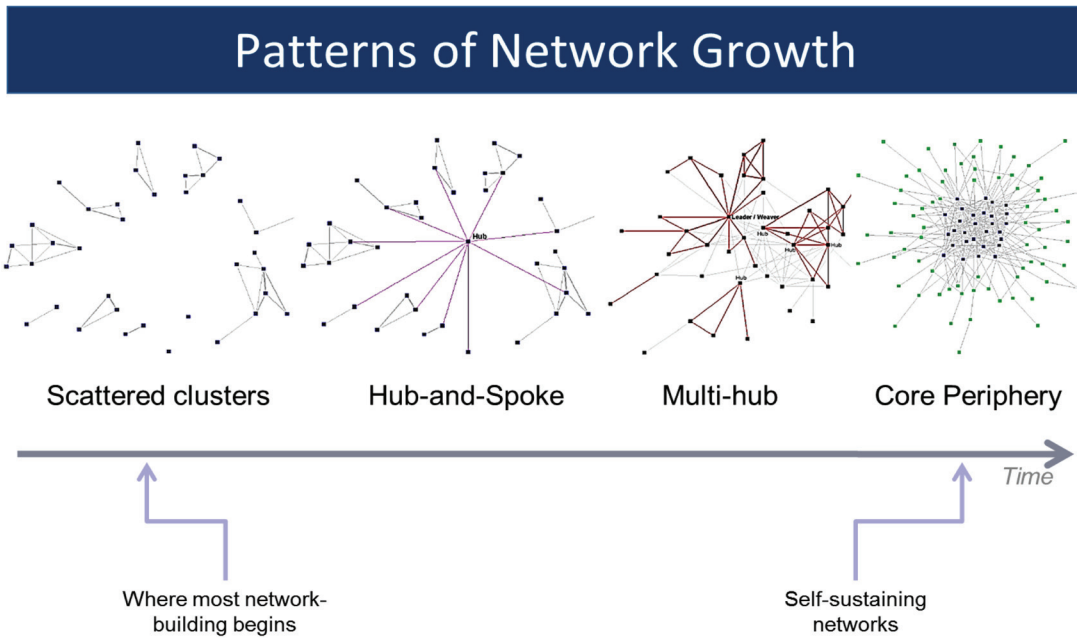
Among the first critical questions Barr faced were “What kind of network?” and “What role should Barr play in its growth and direction?” Drawing on the work of Peter Plastrik and Madeleine Taylor (2006), Barr considered three types of networks: connectivity, alignment, and action. (See Figure 1.) Out of urgency to realize impacts, many large-scale social-change efforts focus on alignment and action. In a context of urgency, investing in connectivity can seem slow, inefficient, or unfocused – a “nice to have,” not a “must have”; possibly a by-product of collaboration, but not a necessary precondition.

Yet, when we actually look at the structure of relationships that animate different types of networks, it becomes clear how connectivity can be a

powerful accelerator and amplifier of all kinds of network activity. (See Figure 2.)

Networks typically begin as scattered clusters of people who know each other and interact in different ways. In the social sector, a next phase of network evolution might be triggered by a foundation spending grant dollars or elected officials spending political capital to convene stakeholders around a particular challenge – kindergarten readiness or high school graduation, for example. This can draw people into orbit around a common goal. In the parlance of network theory, this type of network typically takes the shape of “hub and spoke”: Like a bicycle wheel, it has a single, powerful center linked to many on its periphery. At their best, such networks organize resources, coordinate activities, and get results. With relationships among members orchestrated by the center, however, not all potential synergies are realized. And if the center fails, if financial and political capital is exhausted, they can easily

FIGURE 2 Patterns of Network Growth



Source: "Building Smart Communities Through Network Weaving," by Valdis Krebs and June Holley

flounder, and gains are not sustained. In contrast, "multi-hub" networks are more resilient, more durable, and more efficient. Important information no longer has to go through a single hub. Collaborations emerge organically among members as needs and opportunities arise, rather than as the hub organization dictates. One step beyond multi-hub, "core periphery" networks take these dynamics a step further. In core-periphery networks, a vibrant core of connectivity generates energy and action while a diverse set of connections on the peripheries supply new ideas, relationships, and resources.

The Barr Foundation team knew they didn't want to create a network with Barr as the hub. Grounded in network theory, they sought instead to test the hypothesis that focusing on connectivity alone would lead to a multi-hub network capable of creating enduring personal benefit for leaders and community benefit for the city as a whole. Barr would focus on creating the opportunities for authentic relationships to occur. Common

agendas would emerge from those relationships. They would not be directed by the foundation.

### About the Barr Fellowship Program

The Barr Fellowship begins with a three-month sabbatical. Fellows spend the first two weeks of their sabbatical traveling together to the global south (South Africa, Zimbabwe, Brazil, or Haiti, for example). Structured to immerse fellows as a group in an entirely disruptive learning context, this trip creates the space to think differently. Fellows interact with social and environmental activists who, despite scarce resources and great challenges, provide living examples that stir their imagination, inspire and confirm big aspirations, and bolster confidence for fellows to achieve what they may never have considered possible before.

Following the sabbatical, the foundation gathers fellows on semi-annual overnight retreats for three years. These gatherings continue to deepen the peer network of learning, support, and accountability. While each class of 12 is formally to-



gether for three years, once an executive director is chosen as a fellow they have the option of joining the larger network. Gatherings are held each year for the entire network and these sometimes also include travel.

The creative disruptions of the Barr Fellowship learning journey, sabbatical, and periodic retreats are carefully designed to help fellows develop authentic, trusting relationships (i.e., social capital) with one another that span sectors, races, neighborhoods, and local politics. The Interaction Institute for Social Change, a critical thought partner to the foundation, brings its process design, facilitation skills, and project management expertise to the retreats and learning journeys. This creates space for reflection and for authentic relationships to form. Jorge Martinez, executive director of Project Right, a neighborhood stabilization and economic development organization in Boston's Grove Hall neighborhood, describes the depth of trust he now feels for other fellows and how his learning journey to South Africa was critical to building those bonds:

We were able to open up to each other and state what we thought, what our fears were personally and professionally, where we thought we were going. That was fantastic! To have someone to whom you can say, "I'll call you at three in the morning," or, "I'll be over at your house," or, "I need some time to debrief, a mental health break," or, "my spirits are low." Those are opportunities that were created. You can overcome any obstacle whatsoever if you have someone to fall back on.

From the moment they got off the plane, Martinez's group stuck together, not even dividing up to go through customs. Being in another country together without day-to-day work responsibilities created space for deeper connections.

### Evaluation and Learning

Evaluation has been an important component of the program since the start. The overarching purpose of the evaluation has been to learn about the benefits of sabbaticals for leaders and their organizations and about the network effects of

developing authentic, trusting relationships across boundaries of race, sector, and neighborhood.

The Barr Fellowship evaluation is a hybrid model that uses both a logic model to guide the assessment of intended outcomes and a developmental approach to track emergent connections, new collaborations, and unintended outcomes. In the early years (2005-07), the evaluation focused on the organizational effects of the program (e.g., tenure with the organization, distributed leadership, personal renewal and rejuvenation of the executive director), and on the relationships that developed among leaders in a cohort. In more recent years (2008-12), attention has shifted to cross-cohort and cross-sector relationships and the emergence of new collaborations, experiments in innovation, and resulting community benefit. Shifting the priorities and focus of the evaluation reflects the evolution of the learning questions and the growth of the network to 48 fellows. Table 1 outlines the primary learning questions that have guided evaluation in the fellowship's initial and later years.

### Assessing Personal and Network Social Capital

The Barr Fellowship focuses on fostering changes in the social capital of fellows. Social capital is assessed both quantitatively, using social network analysis, and qualitatively, through interviews. When a new cohort of fellows begins the program, they are asked in a survey to indicate their relationships with all fellows in their cohort and those in previous cohorts. They are asked how well they know each person, if they have collaborated with them, and how frequently they have received work-related advice and support from them. Each year, every fellow is asked the same or similar questions about their connections and collaborations. This data is used to map the network and assess its density (how many connections there are compared to total possible connections) and resilience (how dependent the network is on key individuals; i.e., how many network members have to be removed before the network starts to fragment). Fellows are also asked through interviews about how the quality of their relationships with other fellows is changing over time.

TABLE 1 Fellowship Evaluation Learning Questions

Early Years (2005-2007)	Later Years (2008-2012)
<p><b>Fellows</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Are fellows staying longer with their organizations and in the sector?</li> <li>• Are fellows renewed and more satisfied with their role?</li> </ul> <p><b>Organizations</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Do interim directors have the supports they need to succeed in the leaders' absence?</li> <li>• Do organizations distribute leadership and develop emerging leaders?</li> <li>• Do staff and board members become less reliant on the executive director?</li> <li>• Do organizations develop leadership transition plans?</li> </ul> <p><b>Network</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Is the fellowship cohort becoming more connected?</li> </ul>	<p><b>Fellows</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Do fellows demonstrate vision and commitment to the whole community?</li> <li>• Do they take new risks, cross boundaries, and innovate?</li> </ul> <p><b>Organizations</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Are organizations increasing capacity to work together to create more community benefit?</li> </ul> <p><b>Network</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Are fellows across cohorts forming authentic and honest relationships with one another?</li> <li>• Is there more cross-cohort sharing of ideas, advice-seeking, personal support, and collaboration leading to innovative and breakthrough projects?</li> <li>• Are fellows bridging across sectors and neighborhoods?</li> </ul> <p><b>Global</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Are fellows developing a global mindset and applying that perspective to Boston – an immigrant city?</li> </ul>

Longitudinal data collection has enabled us to identify and analyze who is central in the network, who has the most “bridging” (with others who are different versus “bonding” with those who are similar) social capital, and where there are clusters of fellows working together on specific projects or issues. We have been able to assess the social capital of individual fellows. We have also tracked how information, ideas, and resources get exchanged and what small groups (or “clusters”) have emerged to work together.

### *Assessing Leadership Tenure and Organizational Leadership*

Organizational leadership effects are tracked through surveys and interviews with fellows and through separate surveys and interviews with board chairs. In the early years, these were done in each of the three years of the fellowship. The evaluation looked at the effects of the sabbatical on the organization, how leadership was distributed and restructured, and what the impact of the leader’s absence was.

### *Assessing Collaboration and Network Effects Across Cohorts*

The evaluation assesses the relationships within and across cohorts and across issue areas (education, arts, health and human services, environment, youth). Every year, fellows are asked what issues or projects they are working on with other Barr Fellows. Maps are created of project and issue clusters to understand the issue ecosystem. Maps are also created to gauge cross-cohort connections and collaborations.

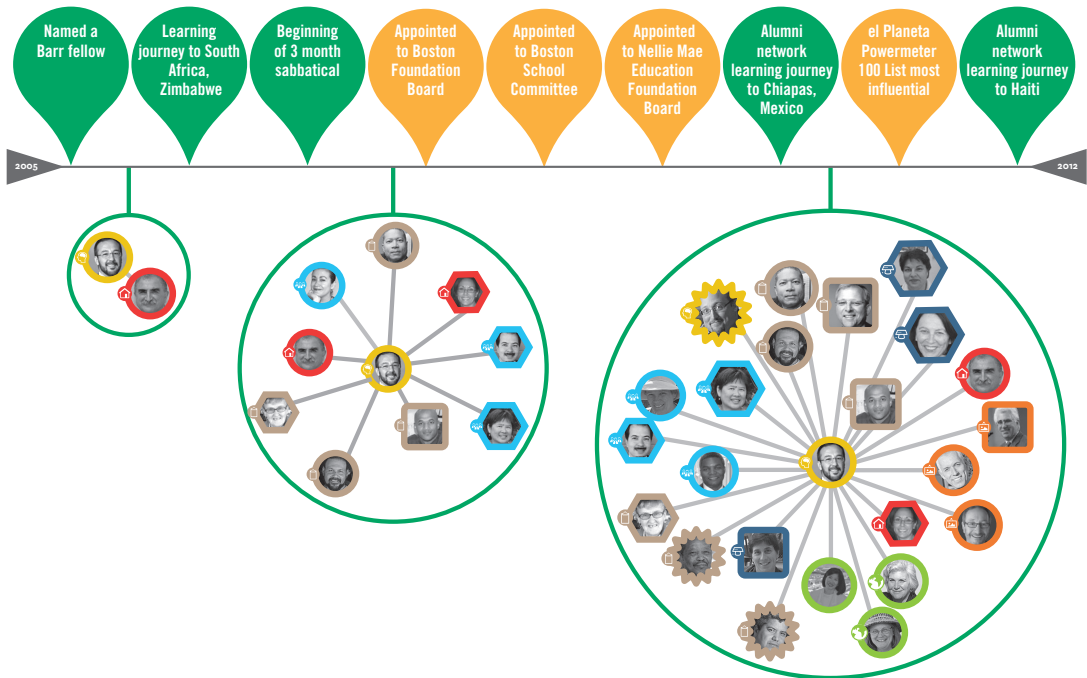
In addition to interviews with fellows, we also interview emerging partners and collaborators who are not fellows – such as other funders, network facilitators, and city leaders – to better understand the effects of the fellowship network on the city, the nonprofit sector, and civic leadership.

### **Results**

Success of the Barr Fellowship is measured in three primary ways: impact on fellows themselves, on their organizations, and on the city as a whole. Indicators include an increase in individu-

FIGURE 3 Claudio Timeline

# Claudio Martinez, Timeline



al's social capital, leaders' tenure and distributed leadership, and network health and the emergence of boundary-crossing collaborations in the city. We touch upon each of these below.

### *Increasing Social Capital*

Through regular network mapping and analysis, Barr has tracked the increase in social capital for individual fellows and across the network. The implications of these changes are then explored through interviews. Drawing on this work, Figure 3 illustrates how the social network of one fellow, Claudio Martinez, has evolved over time as his leadership opportunities in the city have increased.

Martinez joined the Barr Fellowship as the youngest member of his cohort. He leads the Hyde Square Task Force, a youth-serving, youth-empowering organization for Latino immigrants in Boston's Jamaica Plain neighborhood. In his

first network survey, Martinez described knowing and interacting with only one other fellow. In interviews, he described himself as having a well-trained lack of trust in those in positions of power – including other Latino leaders. Yet, when he found himself on a fellowship learning journey with two such leaders, his views began to change dramatically:

In some respects, it has made me more humble, less ideological. I'm an organizer. I work with marginalized, low-income people. I had built up a particular ideology that sometimes prevented me from understanding other points of view. The Barr Fellowship, with so many different people from so many walks of life gave me an important chance to interact and learn from other points of view.

Over the past seven years, as Martinez's network has expanded and his relationships with other fellows have deepened, his influence and public

FIGURE 4 Claudio Network Map



# Claudio Martinez, Barr Fellow class of 2005

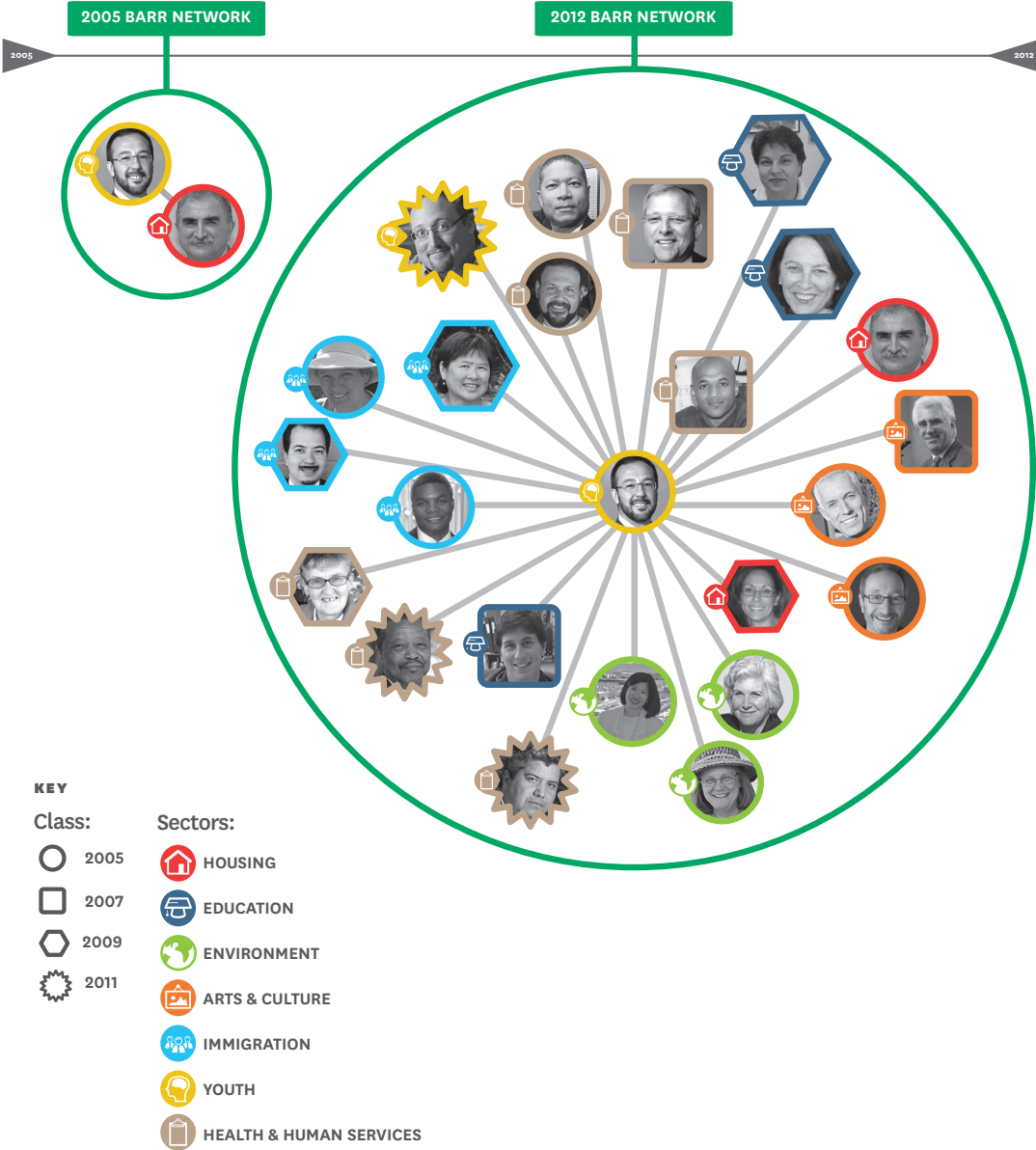
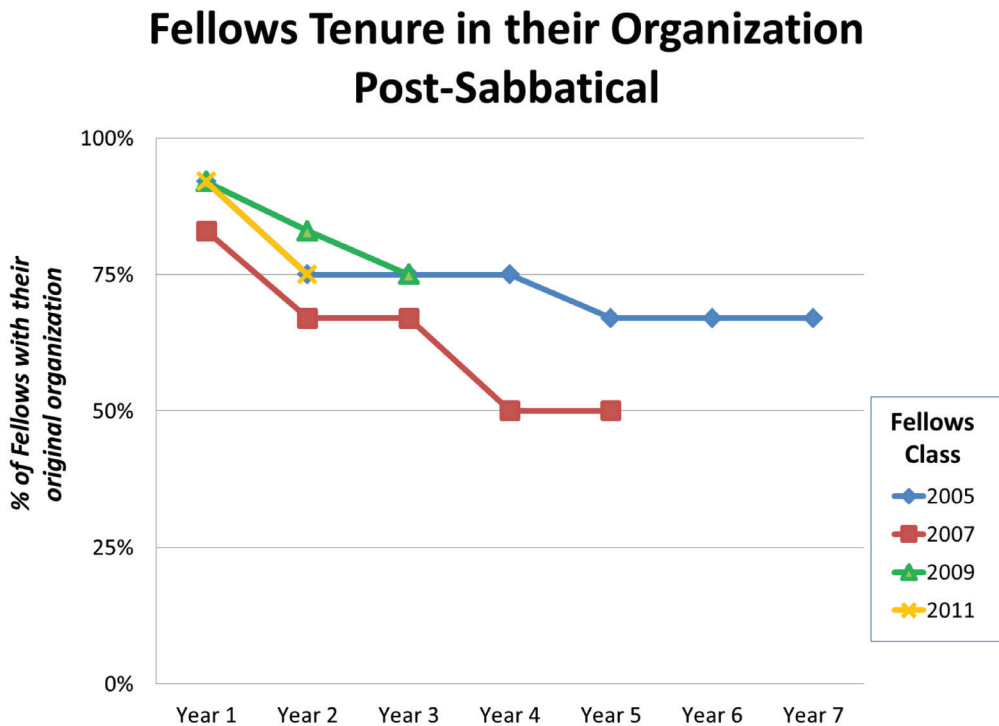


FIGURE 5 Fellows' Tenure in Their Organizations Post-Sabbatical

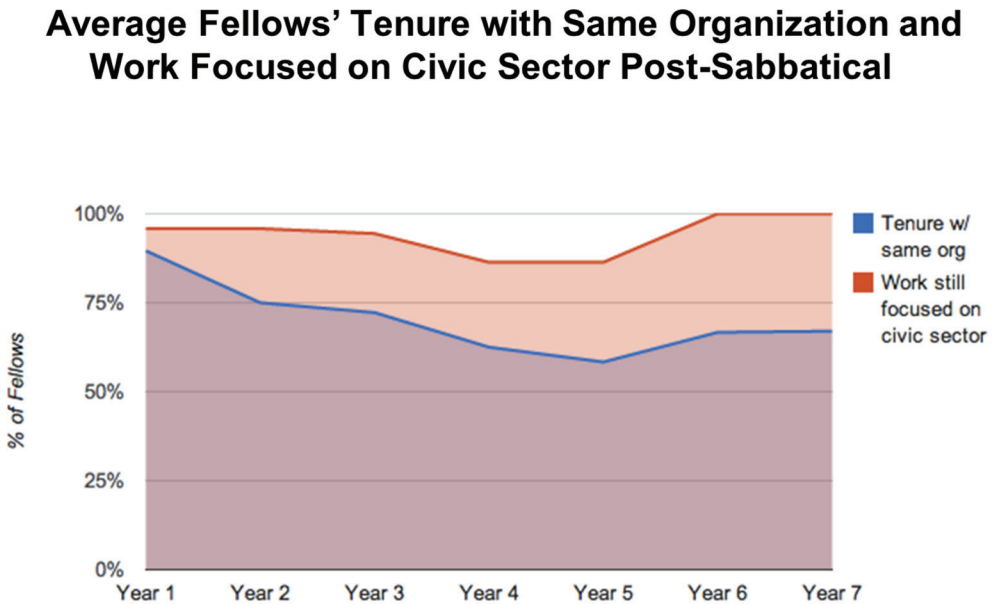


profile as a leader have grown as well. He serves on the Boston School Committee as well as on the boards of the Nellie Mae Education Foundation and the Boston Foundation. In 2010 and 2012, he was named to *El Planeta* magazine's "Powermeter List" of the 100 most influential people in Massachusetts' Hispanic community. In April 2012, he received a national leadership award from the Miami-based Funders Network for Smart Growth and Livable Cities. In recent surveys of fellows, when asked who provided them work-related advice and support, Martinez was among the fellows most often mentioned. Figure 4 provides a closer look at how Martinez's connections to other fellows have increased over time, with network maps drawn from two distinct points in time. It also shows the variety of bridged connections – crossing boundaries of both sector (indicated by color and icon) and Barr Fellowship cohort (indicated by shape).

*Leadership Tenure and Distributed Leadership*  
The Barr Fellowship is intended to rejuvenate

leaders so they continue to make significant contributions in the nonprofit sector – hopefully in the Boston area. Renewed and invigorated, most fellows remain with their organizations long after their fellowship ends. Others may be inspired to start new organizations, to take the helm of different ones, or to contribute as consultants, board members, or in other ways. A 2012 survey of Barr Fellows found that of the original 2005 class of 12 fellows, eight were still at the helm of the same organization and all were still doing work focused on the civic sector. Figure 5 includes data on leadership tenure from each class of fellows. Figure 6 shows averages across all classes and demonstrates a pattern consistent with that of the original 2005 class. Even where greater numbers of fellows have left their original organizations, continued contribution to the sector is the norm.

These results are consistent with the Creative Disruption report by Third Sector New England and CompassPoint Nonprofit Services (2009) that looked at the short- and long-term impacts of

**FIGURE 6** Average Fellows' Tenure with Same Organization and Work Focused on Civic Sector Post-Sabbatical

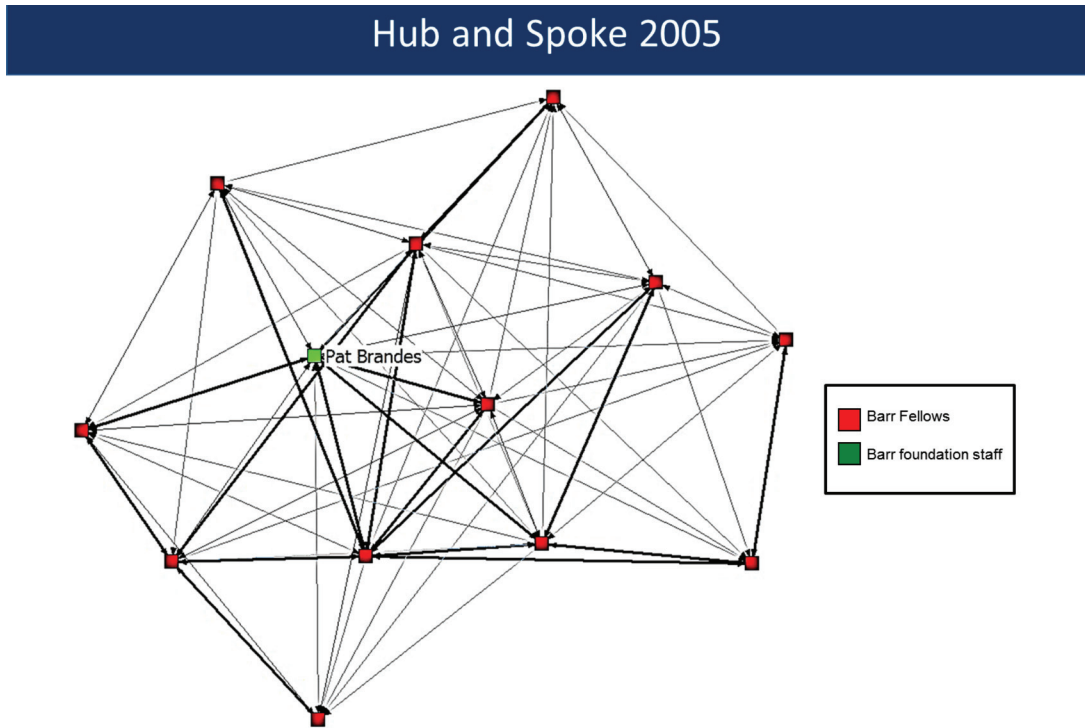
sabbaticals on nonprofit executive directors and on their organizations. The report's findings on executive tenure are summarized in the following:

One of the most common concerns about providing sabbaticals is that so much time away will tempt executive directors to vacate their often-burdensome position. In fact, the data points in the opposite direction. Sabbaticals often reconnect these remarkable people with the reasons they chose their work and leadership positions to begin with. When asked to report on whether their sabbatical had influenced a "decision that I would stay in my job longer than I had previously projected," a third (20 awardees reporting) said that this was true or very much true for them. ... Conversely, only eight respondents (13 percent) said that at the end of their sabbaticals they had made a decision to leave their position in the next one to three years. The majority of those who decided to leave stated that their transitions were better planned and healthier as a result of having had time for reflection (p.7).

Part of what enables not only extended tenure but also new levels of leadership is how a leader's departure changes the nature of leadership in that organization. Based on its early research into sabbatical programs at the Durfee and California Wellness foundations and the fellowship program at the Kellogg Foundation, Barr aimed to structure its sabbaticals so they would do no harm to organizations being left behind. This guided the early decision to provide flexible grants to fellows' organizations (now \$40,000). Soon, however, it became clear that not only did the sabbatical do no harm to organizations left behind, it actually produced enormous benefit. Most organizations became stronger because of the leader's absence. Madeleine Steczynski, a class of 2011 Barr Fellow, describes how this dynamic played out at Zumix, a nonprofit in East Boston focused on youth development through music and creative technology:

One of the biggest differences is that we now have a management team that thinks of themselves as a

FIGURE 7 Hub and Spoke 2005



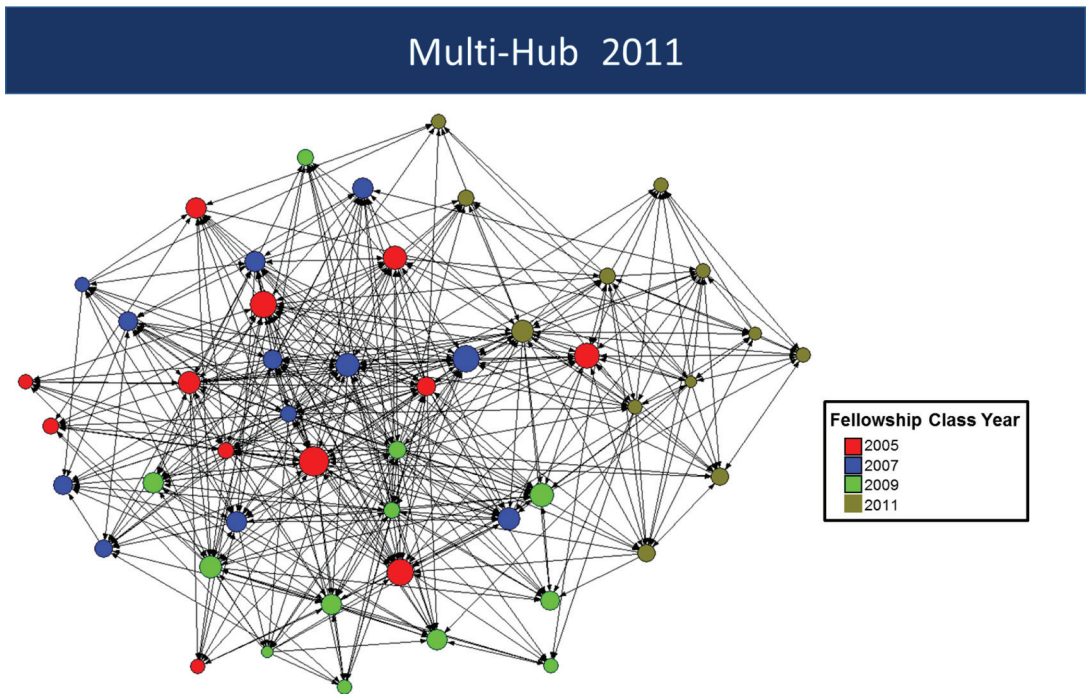
management team and acts like a management team. Everyone was there before – my program director, business director, and development director. And I would check in with each of them to ask their opinions. But now we meet together as a team every week. We talk strategy and organizational stability, and everyone owns their piece in a deeper way. I'm no longer the only one on staff who sees how the pieces connect.

Omo Moses, also a 2011 fellow, described a similar dynamic at the Young People's Project, which uses math literacy as a tool for youth development and social change in Greater Boston and in other sites across the country:

When I returned after my sabbatical, I could immediately tell that I had a larger, stronger core of colleagues who saw themselves as not just contributing to, but responsible for organizational health and success.

In the first years of the Barr Fellowship, evaluations included interviews with board and staff members from fellows' organizations that convinced us that many – though not all – organizations were seeing the organizational benefits of leaders taking sabbaticals. The Creative Disruption report also confirmed this finding – both from the perspective of leaders themselves and from interim leaders who step up during the sabbatical period. For example, after their sabbaticals, 84 percent of leaders reported that they were more comfortable delegating major responsibilities. Eighty-five percent reported that they were sharing a greater amount of decision-making with managers. From the perspective of interim leaders, 60 percent reported that their job had been restructured and that they continued to be responsible for some duties they performed as interim leaders, while 77 percent agreed there was more delegation in their organization.

FIGURE 8 Multi-Hub 2011



### *Network Health and the Emergence of Boundary-Crossing Collaborations*

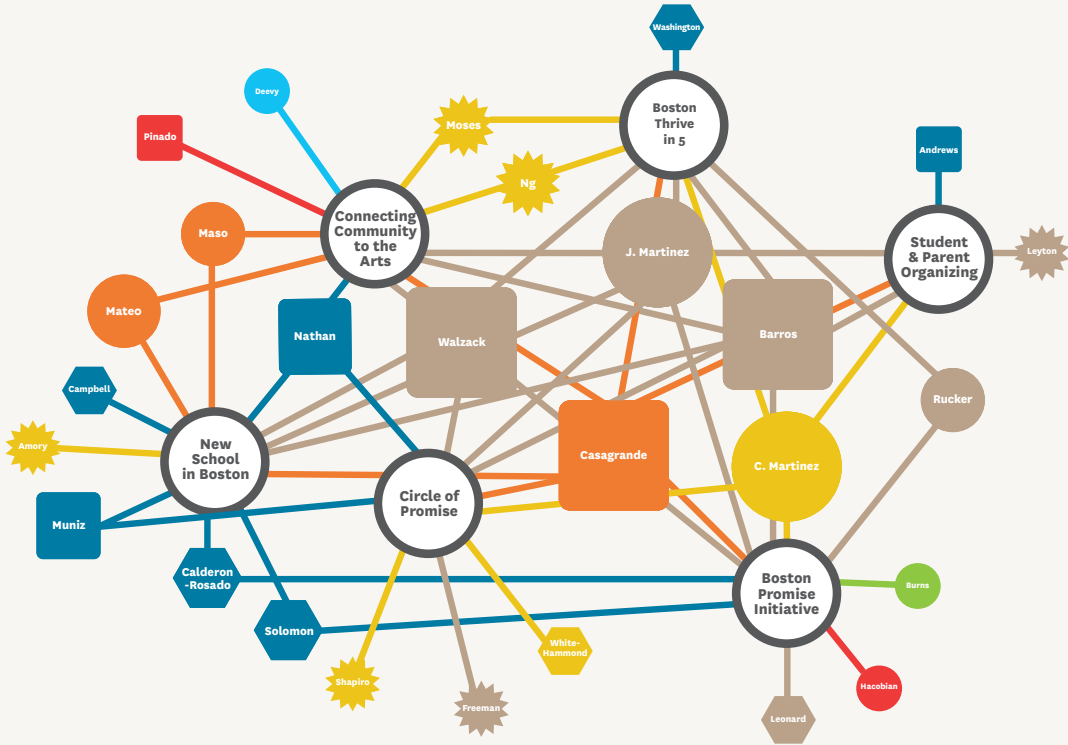
Finally, the fellowship is intended to build a network of boundary-crossing leaders who are diverse in race, ethnicity, discipline, age, and gender and whose actions build a more inclusive civic table in Boston. The measure of success for this dimension is the degree to which the network is knitting the city together through collaborative action. After seven years and 48 fellows, the examples of these are increasing all the time – a strong confirmation of Barr’s initial hypothesis and trust in the potential for emergence. Rather than act as a hub of network activity, Barr focused on creating the conditions for trust and authentic relationships – and on nurturing a multi-hub network. The network maps in Figures 7 and 8 demonstrate the change in the network from a hub-and-spoke pattern in 2005 to a multi-hub pattern in 2011. In 2005, when the first class of 12 fellows was named, Pat Brandes was squarely at the center of their network. By 2011, however, the network had no single center.

What does that mean in terms of collective action and impact? Figure 9 depicts emerging collaborations in one issue area – education. A visual antithesis to a hub-and-spoke network, it shows tightly woven, interconnected clusters of fellows who have self-organized to collaborate on multiple education-related projects, despite coming from different classes and representing many organizations that are not even focused on education. Barr has similar maps charting collaborations in other issue areas. The differing shapes represent different fellows classes. Different colors indicate different sectors. The size of each shape indicates how frequently fellows report getting work-related assistance from each other. Unlike hub-and-spoke networks, this one has no single center. This gives the network its resilience. Even when funding is gone and political winds shift, there is still energy to move collaborations forward – as evidenced by the story of the Boston Promise Initiative from the opening of this article.



FIGURE 9 Education Clusters








# Education Clusters



Barr Fellows class:

-  2005
-  2007
-  2009
-  2011

Sectors:

-  HOUSING
-  EDUCATION
-  ENVIRONMENT
-  ARTS & CULTURE
-  IMMIGRATION
-  YOUTH
-  HEALTH & HUMAN SERVICES



Barr Fellowship class of 2007 learning journey to Africa.

### Advice to Funders and Program Designers

*Consider starting – and staying – focused on relationships and building social capital.* In the social sector, impatience for impact is often regarded as a virtue – and for good reason. The challenges we face leave no room for complacency. Yet, in the race for outcomes we can easily take for granted or miss the power of relationships. Relationships and social capital can certainly be the by-products of long, difficult collaborative efforts. Yet, by starting and staying focused on relationships and on building social capital, funders can help unleash a potent catalyst, accelerator, and force for long-term stewardship of positive change.

*Recognize the power that networks get from diversity.* Attention to diversity – in race, ethnicity, issue area, age, geographic focus, and more – has been part of the Barr Fellowship from the beginning, and not only because it is a deeply held value for the foundation. According to network theory, new ideas tend to emerge not from a network's core, but from its peripheries – where individuals bridge into entirely different networks. This brings new wisdom and new ways of seeing the world. It creates the possibility of

generating new solutions to old problems. While the fellowship was initially focused exclusively on leaders nearing retirement, a few early exceptions to that rule made it clear how much cohorts gain from intergenerational perspectives. The Barr Fellowship design was modified to incorporate this new learning and to include younger fellows.

*Lean on the power of disruption to help bridge across differences.* Social capital comes in two types: bonding (i.e., with others like me) and bridging (i.e., across difference). Typically, bonding is easy. Bridging is hard; yet, it is also vital. More often than not, new approaches to persistent challenges come from leaders able to break out of silos and the groupthink of homogeneous networks. Bridging is also an essential capacity for urban leaders of the 21st century, who must cross boundaries of race and class to create community. This is what makes the Barr Fellowship so special. It is a tightly woven network of bridging connections. One powerful catalyst of such bridging connections is disruption. Experiencing the disruption and disorientation of global travel as a group allows authentic relationships of trust and care to form far more quickly than they would at

home. While the learning journeys to the global south are by far the fellowship's greatest expense, they have also proven to be one of the most valuable parts of the experience for individuals and for the network as whole. For most fellows, it is not only the initial learning journey but also the sabbatical as a whole that is highly disruptive. Each fellow chooses how to spend the sabbatical. Yet, the semi-annual retreats throughout the three years of the fellowship, and retreats for the entire alumni network are intentionally designed. To do this, Barr depends on Interaction Institute for Social Change as a critical partner. The Institute brings its process design, facilitation skills, and project management expertise to the retreats and learning journeys. This ensures that the disruptions include opportunities for reflection, and authentic space for relationship building.

*Get out of the hub, focus on connectivity, and trust in the possibility of emergence.* Early on, Barr determined that its role in the fellows network was to set the table, not the agenda for how it would bring change to Boston. The foundation made a bet on the idea that the bonds of trust and respect that form among social-change leaders would truly be the currency of social change, and it has been investing specifically in those connections without set expectations or requirements about what might emerge. Yet, the results are increasingly clear and continually surprising and inspiring. Lou Casagrande, a class of 2007 Barr Fellow, describes the impact this way:

We've done one-off projects on a limited scale, affecting hundreds of people. Now we're starting to do work affecting thousands of people, and we're seeing the payoff in the investment of time, money, and resources to build this network. It's taken that long to have real impact. It doesn't happen overnight.

## References

- AILWORTH, E. (2010, OCTOBER 22). Forging community ties. *The Boston Globe*, B5.
- BARR FOUNDATION. (2011). *Emerging plan for Boston takes aim at link between Zip code and destiny*. Available online at <http://www.barrfoundation.org/news/emerging-plan-for-boston-takes-aim-at-link-between-zip-code-and-destiny/>
- CONNELLY, P. (2011). The best of the humanistic and technocratic: Why philanthropy requires a balance. *The Foundation Review*, 3(1&2), 121-137.
- GOLDENHAR, D., & HUGHES, M. (2012, SUMMER). Networking a city. *Stanford Social Innovation Review*, 66-71.
- KANIA, J., & KRAMER, M. (2011, WINTER). Collective impact. *Stanford Social Innovation Review*, 36 - 41.
- PLASTRIK, P., & TAYLOR, M. (2006). *Net gains: A handbook for network builders seeking social change*. Available online at <http://networkimpact.org/downloads/NetGainsHandbookVersion1.Pdf>
- THIRD SECTOR NEW ENGLAND AND COMPASSPOINT. (2009). *Creative Disruption*. Available online at <http://www.compasspoint.org/creativedisruption>
- TIERNEY, T. (2006). *The nonprofit sector's leadership deficit*. Boston: Bridgespan Group.
- U.S. DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION. (2012). Secretary Duncan announces seventeen 2012 Promise Neighborhoods winners in school safety address at Neval Thomas Elementary School. Available online at <http://www.ed.gov/news/press-releases/secretary-duncan-announces-seventeen-2012-promise-neighborhoods-winners-school-s>

*Stefan Lanfer, M.B.A., is knowledge officer for the Barr Foundation. Correspondence concerning this article should be addressed to Stefan Lanfer, Barr Foundation, Pilot House – Lewis Wharf, Boston, MA 02110 (email: stefan.lanfer@barrfoundation.org)*

*Patricia Brandes, M.B.A., is the executive director of the Barr Foundation.*

*Claire Reinelt, Ph.D., is research and evaluation director for the Leadership Learning Community.*