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Editorial

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DEAR READERS

This issue on strategic communications is the last in our first volume on community change. Foundations have long used communications to serve their own management, administrative and reporting needs. They have communicated about the availability of funds and the awarding of grants, staff changes and board appointments, and donations received. More recently, however, foundations have begun using strategic communications, either directly or through grantees, to further their social change agendas and to work towards their missions.



The first two articles in this issue describe two communications efforts and their results. **Reisman, Gienapp, Langley, Cohen, Ci-pollone, Kelly, Crary, and Chong** report how the KIDS COUNT data produced by the Annie E. Casey Foundation have been used to achieve media coverage of children’s welfare. The foundation supported grantees to engage in a variety of activities surrounding the release of the data, which led to both the quantity and quality of coverage that they believe will lead to action. They will continue to follow this work in the coming years. **Easterling, Sampson, and Probst** report on a community initiative of the Duluth Superior Area Community Foundation to foster greater civility in public dialogue – a project in which standards about how public dialogue should take place were shared. They report some evidence of changes in the targeted audiences as well as some diffusion of the standards.

The four articles in the Tools sections each focus on a different aspect of strategic communications. **Meyer** describes an innovative use of journalists and video by the John S. and James L. Knight Foundation to augment traditional evaluations. One goal was to broaden the audience for the evaluation results. Although some positive outcomes were reported (e.g., board members responded well), there was very little use of the video reports by others. The author makes some recommendations on how to improve upon their experience. **St-Pierre and Burley** developed a tool to assess the factors that contribute to the effectiveness of funder collaborations. The importance of communications in keeping all of the partners working together is often under-emphasized. Their tool demonstrated the importance of this facet of communications and provides a framework for assessing the health of such efforts.

Asibey, van Fleet, and Parras report on a survey of foundations regarding the evaluation of their communications efforts and share a tool for conducting these evaluations. They report that few foundations routinely evaluate their efforts, citing lack of capacity as a key barrier. The tool they developed provided a straightforward framework for evaluating communications.

The final article in the Tools section is the second of a two-part series on systems thinking. In this article, **Stroh and Zurcher** provide examples of how systems thinking tools can be applied

and how foundations may need to change their own practices in order to enable themselves to work more systemically.

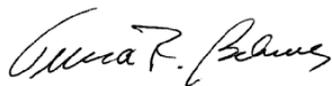
In the Reflective Practice section, we have a thought-provoking piece by **Bare**, who argues that the accountability movement in philanthropy runs the risk of shifting the focus of funders from community impact to their own internal accountability practices. He highlights some frameworks and evaluation approaches that can provide useful information and keep the focus on community impact.

In looking back at this volume on community change, both the papers that were published and those that were not, it was interesting to note that the type of papers submitted was different for the different thematic areas. The papers submitted for the issue on comprehensive community initiatives (CCI's) were predominantly focused on evaluation results. As a field of practice, CCI's has become mature enough that many efforts have been undertaken and rigorously evaluated. The policy and advocacy issue papers, on the other hand, tended more toward frameworks and tools – how to think about, carry out, and evaluate policy and advocacy work – along with evaluation results. This field is at a stage of development where foundations that were early adopters of policy and advocacy work have begun to evaluate and systematize their learning.

The civic engagement and communications issues both received more tools submissions. Many of the submissions were reports of what foundations were doing, rather than tested tools or the results of the work. This suggests that these areas of philanthropic work are at earlier stages of development, where the nature of the work itself is still being clarified. The civic engagement papers also varied in whether civic engagement was a strategy or an outcome – something that the field will likely to continue to debate.

In the coming year, we will have two unthemed issues (1 and 3) and two thematic issues (Issue 2 on diversity and Issue 4 on international grantmaking). If you have suggestions for thematic issue for Volume 3 (2011), please feel free to be in touch with me at behrenst@foundaitonreview.org.

Finally, I'd like to invite you to visit our website, www.foundationreview.org to stay current on our series of webinars with authors. The webinars are free for subscribers, and you can also subscribe at the website.



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