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Editorial

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Editorial

VOL. 10 ISSUE 4

Dear readers,

After falling somewhat into disfavor based on a lack of demonstrable, community-wide progress (Kubisch, Auspos, Brown, and Dewar, 2010), the last decade has witnessed a rebirth of attention to place-based strategies for change (Brown, 2017; Behrens, 2018). Kania and Kramer (2011) provided added impetus to this refocus on communities by providing a simple framework — collective impact — for organizing community stakeholders to work together on targeted outcomes.

This model came under criticism as too top-down, failing to engage community members and grassroots organizations in identifying desired changes and collaboration to craft solutions (e.g., Wolf, 2016). Those committed to the basic collective impact model have modified their approach to be more inclusive,¹ others committed to community change have adopted different approaches and tools that build community participation in from the beginning. This issue on *Inclusive Community Change* highlights some of these alternative approaches and tools.



Teri Behrens, Ph.D.

The Denver Foundation used a community navigator approach, creating a peer-learning network among those whose job it is to help close service gaps and engage marginalized communities in the process. **Schaffer, Patiño, Jones, and Sullivan** share what they learned from this field-building approach to community change.

Simon, Nolan, Scobie, Backler, McDowell, Cotton, and Cloutier report on the work of the Neil and Louise Tillotson Fund (a donor-advised fund of the New Hampshire Charitable Foundation) to create an integrated early childhood services delivery system in a rural area. Local community members joined forces with the fund to build capacity and quality in the system.

Brudney and Prentice examine how a tool relatively new to nonprofits — geographic information systems — can support community building. They argue that nonprofits, and particularly foundations, can use this technology to increase public participation, incorporate diverse stakeholders, improve organizational operations, increase market efficiencies, and build stronger communities.

The ABL change framework (**Foster-Fishman and Watson**) includes a set of tools for engaging diverse stakeholders across an array of settings to become actors of change. The authors argue that these tools, which they have used in communities across the country, can be used by foundations to create the conditions that promote inclusive community change.

Francis, Desmond, Williams, Chubinski, Zimmerman, and Young describe the tools created for the Thriving Communities model, supported by Interact for Health, a health conversion foundation

¹ See <http://collectiveimpactforum.org>.

serving the three-state region of Greater Cincinnati, Ohio. The goal of this community-learning model is to embed health promotion and advocacy work in communities while building an equitable infrastructure to spread evidence-based practices.

Reflective Practice

Braff-Guajardo, Hang, Cooksy, Braughton, and Lo reflect on how a funder collaborative can increase and coordinate philanthropic investments to address the root causes of inequity. They describe a “community first” model, which emerged from the experience of a funders collaborative created to advance equity through policy and systems change in California’s San Joaquin Valley. A model that seeks to create a partnership between funders and community and act equitably is key to “walking the talk” of inclusion.

A partnership among the Alleghany Foundation, two school districts, and the University of Virginia, explored by **Rimm-Kaufman, Donnan, Garcia, Snead-Johnson, Kotulka, and Sandilos**, provided evidence that school leaders and community members must be aligned in order for sustained school improvements to be achieved. With so many education policies and practices made at the local level, community-based foundations are in a unique position to support their local school districts in taking a comprehensive, systematic approach to improving the lives of young people.

The David and Lucile Packard Foundation created Starting Smart and Strong, a 10-year place-based commitment to early learning in three California communities. **Sunshine and Sangalang** reflect on the foundation’s experience, three years into implementation, with managing this complex initiative. Foundation staff, especially program officers, were compelled to think differently about how to engage with the community.

Beginning in 2011, Vancouver Foundation invested significant time, energy, ideas, and money in bringing together immigrant and refugee youth and young people with lived experience of the foster care system in British Columbia. **Smith** describes the Fostering Change and Fresh Voices initiatives, in which the foundation worked in partnership with these young people to address the issues that affect their lives. This article describes the roles the foundation played in these inclusive community change efforts, and reflects on the commitments, mindsets, and capacities necessary to effectively perform each of those roles.

Some observations across these articles are:

1. *Mindset matters.* Approaching the work of community change with a mindset of genuine partnership is a basic requirement for inclusive change. While this may be obvious, “tools” or “models” for change are needed but they can’t mask a less-than-genuine commitment to partnership.
2. *Community change is almost always system-building work.* While the terminology may differ (aligning, networking, field-building, etc.), the core work described in these articles is working with communities to connect parts to create higher functioning systems.
3. *Foundations are part of the systems they seek to change.* How foundations interact with each other and other community institutions, how they conceptualize their role in the community and how these in turn play out in the daily work of program staff — these all are part of the community system and need to part of the change efforts.

4. *There is no one “right” model.* Having a model to work from may be helpful, especially one that has inclusive partnerships built in, but there’s no evidence to date that any one model is superior in fostering inclusive change.

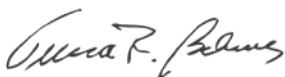
One of the tenets of adaptive systems is that systems self-organize around simple rules. As I’ve noted elsewhere (Behrens and Foster-Fishman, 2007), focusing on system players following a set of simple rules, perhaps variations on the observations above, might make the biggest difference in communities.

This issue also includes reviews of two recent books that are relevant for the theme of this issue. **Pankaj** reviews *The Goldilocks Challenge: Right-fit Evidence for the Social Sector*. Finding the right approach to evidence is a key challenge to change efforts and this book offers some useful suggestions. **Olivarez** reviews *Decolonizing Wealth*, which calls for radical change in the mindset we bring to philanthropic dollars.

Thank you to the **Colorado Health Foundation** and the **California Endowment** for their sponsorship of this issue, which allows us to make the entire issue open access.

As we close out Volume 10, I want to thank the many field experts who have contributed their time to providing thoughtful peer reviews of submitted articles. Our authors often express their gratitude for the feedback they get to improve their work. A list of reviewers for Volume 10 is included in the back of the issue.

Finally, as we complete our tenth year of publication, I want to thank all of you who support the journal by submitting articles, sponsoring articles or whole issues, and sharing the journal with your peers. We’re proud to play some small role in helping to advance the field and your contributions of time, talent, treasure and ties make it possible.



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