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RESULTS

Collaboration and Foundation Leadership: Challenges, Opportunities, and Impact

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Keywords: Collaboration, foundation/community partnerships, green and healthy homes

Key Points

- This article describes a successful collaboration among foundation, city government, and nonprofit stakeholders that leveraged an initial investment of \$60,000 to \$4.5 million in public and private funding to create a sustainable Green & Healthy Homes Initiative™ for low- and moderate-income neighborhoods in Providence, R.I.
- Through a partnership with the Rhode Island Foundation, the Council on Foundations, and the Coalition to End Childhood Lead Poisoning, the city of Providence developed a comprehensive approach to integrated health, safety, lead-hazard reduction, energy-efficiency, and weatherization interventions for low- and moderate-income families.
- The project was led by a steering committee of more than 30 city, state, and nonprofit organizations and agencies committed to upgrading 125 Providence housing units by the end of 2012.
- Accomplishments of this project include newly trained minority contractors to perform weatherization; healthy homes and lead-hazard control work; resident educators to deliver health, safety, and energy-efficiency education to participating households; and an electronic data-collection system. In addition, all participants in the project are committed to comprehensive program evaluation.
- Collaborative practices that led to program success, include the use of an intermediary organization, the decisions behind the composition of the steering committee, and how partners used “braided” resources to create green and healthy housing units. Challenges around project management and interagency communication as well as lessons learned to improve replicability in other locales are also discussed.

The Rhode Island Foundation, one of the largest and oldest community foundations in the country, will celebrate its 100th birthday in 2016. It is indisputable that the foundation has made a difference to the community it serves – the state of Rhode Island – over this past century. But, like many other philanthropic institutions and individuals, it is starting to take a harder look at the extent of community change it is making and how, in these particularly challenging economic times, it can go deeper, enhance its impact and return on investment, and, put simply, glean better results.

The foundation has a core approach to discretionary grantmaking, e.g., supporting a Rhode Island nonprofit organization to undertake a critical body of work that advances a set of identified sector priorities. It provides funding in the areas of arts and culture, community and economic development, education, environment, health, and human services. Supporting and strengthening each sector remains key to fulfilling the foundation’s mission of meeting the needs of the people of Rhode Island. Gaining traction as a further means for propelling its agenda is a more collaborative approach, one that encourages multiple nonprofits, stakeholders, perspectives, and skill sets to collectively address an issue or set of issues. This is not a new concept – the rewards from investing in coalition-building and cross-sector partnerships can be observed throughout the philanthropic field. Yet it is challenging: The

pace can be agonizingly slow and cultivating the essential leadership ingredients can be fraught with complications when working with multiple organizations of varying levels of capacity serving an array of interests. This article offers a look at one collaborative effort, seeded by the Rhode Island Foundation, that continues to develop into an effective vehicle for achieving meaningful outcomes for families.

In the summer of 2009, the Council on Foundations and the Annie E. Casey Foundation invited foundation leaders, including Neil Steinberg, president and chief executive officer of the Rhode Island Foundation, to participate in discussions with White House officials about a potential new public/private partnership role for philanthropy. The meeting hosts were seeking feedback on how to best help communities maximize the benefits from American Recovery and Reinvestment Act (ARRA) funding making its way to state agencies and programs. ARRA could be a game changer: Here was a once-in-a-lifetime injection of funds offering a unique opportunity to have tremendous impact while greatly accelerating progress on a community revitalization agenda. By wielding their resources and convening power in conjunction with this federal investment, could the philanthropic and private sectors leverage this moment to create opportunities for long-term benefit and systemic community change?

Steinberg joined counterparts from around the country that summer for meetings in Washington, D.C., to discuss this question. These initial talks focused on weatherization funds streaming out of the U.S. Department of Energy as a result of the stimulus effort. Some states were not spending ARRA funds fast enough to achieve anticipated outcomes within the prescribed timeline. From a public health perspective, there was a call for caution in promoting weatherization retrofits in response to rising concerns that tightening up substandard homes to increase insulation and lower utility costs for residents in need could also cause or exacerbate the health problems generated from unhealthy home conditions. The hope that increased weatherization funding would stimulate job creation was tempered by

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the necessity for workforce development and a concern that the demand for a newly trained workforce would not be sustained once the ARRA dollars were spent.

The field of philanthropy widely recognizes that complex social issues (including climate change, unemployment, and inadequate housing) demand multiple intervention strategies. They also require an assortment of tools, a tolerance for experimentation, and a degree of risk. In general, foundations have greater agility and capacity to meet those demands than do their partners in government, save for the high level of funding that federal agencies are often able to invest. The structure and nature of federal agencies and funding programs in silos, however, do not lend themselves easily to initiatives that touch upon multiple dimensions or angles of an issue or set of issues. This disconnect, coupled with the shortfall of local, community-grounded knowledge, was one of the primary reasons for gathering foundation leaders at the Washington summit. For those responsible for demonstrating results from the

ARRA infusion of funds, closing that knowledge gap and forging links among these silos was more essential and urgent than ever.

For community foundations in particular, filling community-leadership voids and assuming the role of convener are two of their most important functions and as a result they can and must tolerate risk in order meet these community needs.

Given these considerations, alongside the opportunity being presented through ARRA, the meeting participants developed two working hypotheses. First, federal funding streams from different agencies and programs could be “braided” or woven together, making it possible to coordinate and integrate housing interventions and create “green and healthy” homes; “braiding” blends separate funding streams to support unified services. Second, institutionalizing this approach with the support of the philanthropic and private sectors could multiply and sustain the environmental, health, and economic outcomes for American families. The meeting participants were asked to return home and talk with local stakeholders to help vet and test these hypotheses.

Framing the Issues

Upon his return, Steinberg met with members of the foundation’s grant programs staff to look at Rhode Island’s needs in the areas of healthy homes and energy efficiency. The state’s capital, Providence, shares many challenges faced by former industrial centers across the country, particularly in New England. Lacking disposable income, poor and working class families cannot afford home repair and retrofitting services and depend on public loans or grants to retrofit or remediate health issues in their homes. Poor-quality

housing for low-income communities is unlikely to be energy efficient and can pose risks to health and safety. Rhode Island Foundation program officers were hearing from their nonprofit partners in the field that high energy costs were often forcing families to choose between paying their utility bills and buying food.

Relevant statistics include:

- Of the approximately 65,000 housing units in Providence, 79 percent were built before 1969 (U.S. Census Bureau, 2012), resulting in many older homes that are energy inefficient or fail to meet basic health and safety standards.
- More than 61,000 Providence residents (30.5 percent) earn less than 80 percent of the nation’s median income (U.S. Census Bureau, 2012).
- Eleven percent of the children in Rhode Island are diagnosed with asthma (Pearlman, Robinson, Sutton, & Goldman, 2010) and most asthma attacks are triggered by causes in the home. Most of the high clusters of asthma “hot spots” in Rhode Island are found in Providence County.
- In 2009, 158 children, concentrated in the core cities of Rhode Island, were diagnosed with elevated blood levels (Rhode Island Department of Health, 2010).

Given these conditions, the potential to help Rhode Island families through an integrated and coordinated system of housing interventions was especially compelling. It could be argued that for community foundations in particular, filling community-leadership voids and assuming the role of convener are two of their most important functions and as a result they can and must tolerate risk in order meet these community needs. In this case, the question of whether to play a leadership role was not debated at the board level. Staff and foundation leadership did not view this as potentially injuring the foundation’s reputation. The primary concern, as always when a foundation leads any discussion or activity, was managing expectations. In the early stages, the foundation made it clear that it was committing only to bringing stakeholders together for an initial

discussion of the viability of integrated federal funding programs in delivering comprehensive housing retrofits. Steinberg tapped two grant program officers whose primary responsibilities over both the foundation's Environment and Community and Economic Development sectors offered the expertise and community contacts to oversee the project. The staff's first step was to identify and interview key state, city, and nonprofit leaders to gauge their interest in a multistakeholder, cross-sector convening around comprehensive housing upgrades benefitting low and middle-income families and homeowners in Rhode Island. These initial conversations provided the basis for an invitation list, a meeting agenda, and, more important, the growing sense that the foundation was ideally situated, as a community leader and convener, to create a productive space for this exchange and vetting of ideas.

In September 2009, the foundation hosted and facilitated the first meeting. The 21 attendees represented multiple affiliations, including the Rhode Island departments of Environmental Management and Health; Rhode Island Housing; the offices of the governor and the mayor of Providence; nonprofit organizations engaged in energy-efficiency work, affordable housing, and workforce development; universities; and National Grid, the local energy provider. The goal of the meeting – to provide feedback to the White House, the Annie E. Casey Foundation, and the Council on Foundations on the hypotheses developed in Washington – was designed to stimulate candid discussion among participants who rarely if ever shared a convening table or common objective. Participants were asked several questions: From a community perspective, would an attempt to weave together funding streams to deliver a comprehensive set of housing upgrades be desirable and, if so, was it possible? What did community-based organizations see as barriers to implementation of such an approach? What were some innovative ways to circumvent these obstacles?

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partners and grantees are rightly focused on their narrow missions and don't have the time or capacity to take a step back to examine strategies or data beyond their current scope. The ensuing discussion provided that opportunity. The exchange produced information that the foundation was seeking and was fertile ground for seeding linkages among the participants, their organizations, priorities, and programs. Participants expressed a strong need for streamlined, cost-effective, and systematic ways to upgrade the city's housing stock and meet appropriate energy, health, and safety standards. On the whole, they were interested in the concept and intrigued by the federal government's efforts to solicit local feedback and input, but they also readily identified and listed numerous barriers to integrating funding streams and programs. These barriers included differing federal-agency grant cycles and eligibility requirements, various city and state authorities overseeing the relevant programs, and discrepancies in how funds could be used.

One participant, a man with vast experience in higher education and state government and who was serendipitously about to become director of the Rhode Island Office of Energy Resources, noted that it was necessary to focus on state

policy and service-delivery systems before tackling federal barriers. If it “doesn’t work on the street,” he argued, “it doesn’t work.” In other words, program integration could only take place on site and an integrated initiative would need to be configured from the bottom up. While federal buy-in was vital, it was not sufficient for this work to succeed.

At the meeting it became clear that there were multiple challenges: a lack of multiagency coordination and communication stemming from limited capacity and resources, service redundancies, and belabored processes for residents to receive services. These challenges were blocking a comprehensive remediation effort in the city.

In terms of innovation, the group also learned about an effort being considered “on the street” by the Providence Department of Planning and Development, which administers the city’s lead mitigation funding. The department announced at the meeting that it had begun exploring a similar program: coordinating home-energy audits with lead assessments to develop and implement an integrated plan for upgrading homes. It is worth noting that lead-abatement funding and programs were administered by the city but that the weatherization programs and funding were primarily run by a local nonprofit, the Providence Community Action Program. At the meeting it became clear that there were multiple challenges: a lack of multiagency coordination and communication stemming from limited capacity and resources, service redundancies, and belabored

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Following the meeting, the foundation shared what it had heard and learned with the federal agencies, the Annie E. Casey Foundation, and the Council on Foundations. The foundation also shared its experiences with its counterparts in other parts of the country who were asking similar questions in their communities.

The foundation had fulfilled the original commitment to the White House – or had it? It had brought people together with different perspectives, interests, and skills to talk about critical community needs, relevant programs, and resources. There were people around the table working on similar issues who had never met. It was also clear that there were significant underutilized community resources. Through the facilitated dialogue, a more comprehensive understanding was emerging about how programs, resources, and systems should interact in order to address substandard housing. Foundation staff recognized that the commitment of those around the table should not be squandered and began seriously considering if and how the foundation should continue to participate.

Expectations, not surprisingly, are raised when a foundation takes the lead on an issue. Could the Rhode Island Foundation manage those expectations as it assisted in the pursuit of these concepts and the melding of an effective coalition? The emerging “green and healthy homes” concept was aligned with the foundation’s grantmaking priorities, which include improving living conditions and health indicators and reducing energy consumption. And although the meeting was deemed productive and informative, it was understood that there was no impetus for the group to continue the dialogue on its own; the foundation needed to fill the leadership void as the nascent initiative began to take its first steps. Subsequently, foundation leadership and the grant programs staff began working on the project, and planning for a second meeting began in earnest.

Deepening Its Involvement

The foundation recognized the need and advantage to reconvening stakeholders in a timely manner, thereby capturing the momentum generated from the September meeting. This time, the stakes were higher. The agenda had to be focused and clear. The glimpse into the city's thinking around a coordinated housing intervention effort had sparked a lot of interest. The foundation asked the Providence Department of Planning and Development to expand upon this information and make a presentation at the second meeting on their work to date, hoping it would serve as a springboard for a broader conversation. The invitation list was refined and included additional nonprofit representatives and housing groups that had been identified at the first meeting as potential partners. Despite good intentions, the second meeting did not happen until early December. Foundation staff made a concerted effort to stay in touch with partners by email in the interim to report back on any progress at the federal level as well as the meeting planning itself. Nineteen participants attended the second meeting. There were a few new faces, but most of the group had been to the first meeting and had some context for participation.

The city's presentation on the emerging initiative, dubbed "weather leadation," identified additional barriers to add to the growing list of challenges to a coordinated approach to housing improvements. For example, one local nonprofit described its attempt to coordinate services and funding for housing improvements. Based on eligibility requirements, varying grant cycles, and target populations, the agency was eventually left with only a single home in its pilot that met the array of conditions. A baby lived in that home, making it a high priority for lead-abatement work; yet by the time multiple contractors assessed the house and work was completed, the child was 6 years old. Nevertheless, the city was committed to finding ways to overcome these challenges.

The discussion teased out additional obstacles:

- Programs placed insufficient emphasis on resident behavior change.

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- Data collection and evaluation were inadequate.
- Referral systems were underdeveloped and uncoordinated.
- There were inherent challenges to leveraging resources (i.e., various eligibility requirements and grant cycles).
- There was a strong need to upgrade skills of contractors and workers.

The foundation and the city of Providence were clearly two of the partners key to launching this initiative. It was also becoming evident that in order to maximize outcomes and benefits, another partner who would add capacity to the city and serve as an intermediary between the federal and other national resources and the Providence effort would be required.

Nurturing the Collaboration Process

The second stakeholder meeting provided more helpful information and reinforced the foundation's interest in advancing the effort, yet what shape that work would take was still unknown. Participants were discouraged because a clear agenda and structure around this idea of "green and healthy homes" had not yet crystallized. Leadership still resided with the foundation, although Providence's Department of Planning and Development was now a possible partner to consider as the driver of this initiative. The

question of leadership capacity, of course, was a deterrent and could possibly derail such an undertaking. The foundation was not confident that the city was in a position to take on the various administration, management, coordination, and communication roles necessary to move the project forward.

Many of the local stakeholders had first-hand experience with the inefficiency and uncoordinated nature of federal funding programs. The coalition model offered a platform and process for addressing those inefficiencies in a systematic way.

At the same time, the Coalition to End Childhood Lead Poisoning, a nonprofit organization based in Baltimore, was being tapped by the White House and the Council on Foundations to play a larger role in the national Green & Healthy Homes Initiative (GHHI), which was just formally taking shape. The Coalition's mission is to create resources, programs, and policies to prevent childhood lead poisoning and home-based environmental health hazards. Over several months following the second meeting, foundation staff and Providence officials interacted with the Coalition around the work going on in Providence and elsewhere. In partnership with the Annie E. Casey Foundation, the Coalition had developed a green-and-healthy program, set green-and-healthy-standards, and had begun a pilot project in Baltimore.

The key question for stakeholders remained: Was this model appropriate for Rhode Island? The lead partners decided to create an opportunity for stakeholders to learn more about the Green & Healthy Homes Initiative to better evaluate its ap-

plicability and potential benefits for Rhode Island.

In April 2010, Coalition Executive Director Ruth Ann Norton gave a presentation to a third meeting of the stakeholder group that highlighted the Coalition's strong support from the Department of Energy, the Environmental Protection Agency, the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development, the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, the Council on Foundations, the Funders Network for Smart Growth and Livable Communities, the National Environmental Health Association, and more than 15 local and national foundations for the Green & Healthy Homes movement. This presentation was followed by an update by the city's Planning Department on the "weather leadation" effort. This meeting, building on the previous two stakeholder gatherings and ongoing discussions, helped solidify:

- the issues and need in Rhode Island around healthy and energy-efficient housing,
- a clearer understanding of the possible benefits that could be realized through an integrated approach,
- a sense of the possible resources that could be applied to this work, and
- a promising direction and agenda.

Not only did the Coalition model define ideas that were surfacing in the foundation-led meetings, it provided a direction. Energy-efficiency funding was not being spent in Rhode Island. Those residents most in need of lower utility costs and housing improvements were not being reached. Many of the local stakeholders had first-hand experience with the inefficiency and uncoordinated nature of federal funding programs. The model offered a platform and process for addressing those inefficiencies in a systematic way. Most critically, perhaps, the Coalition model focused on institutional change to delivery systems that would live beyond ARRA funding.

This emerging focus and decision to apply the Coalition model in Rhode Island formalized the effort and led to what is now known as the Providence Green & Healthy Homes Initiative.

Collaboration 2.0

The meeting cemented the commitment of the foundation and the meeting participants toward pursuing a comprehensive “whole house” strategy to better serve low- and moderate-income populations at the local level. At this point, the foundation was prepared to consider committing financial resources to the program. But how best to invest? As a rule, the foundation does not fund capital projects or expenses that clearly would be a significant budget item for a green and healthy homes demonstration project. Providence, like other cities around the country in this period, was facing severe financial challenges. Could a grant from the foundation support its leadership role in this work and also relieve the city of the administrative tasks that were essential in order for this pilot to succeed? In discussions with the Coalition and other foundations (such as the Annie E. Casey Foundation) that were also getting involved in this work nationally, it became evident that a local coordinator – an “outcomes broker” – was a vital ingredient. As the Providence stakeholders had agreed there was strong alignment between local needs and the issues being addressed by the Coalition-led model, the Rhode Island Foundation felt confident that the Coalition, which was rapidly establishing a strong track record in Baltimore and elsewhere with its green-and-healthy homes model, would be an effective intermediary by providing a framework for the local work and connection to a national network of resources. Foundation staff concluded that providing support for the coordinator position through the Coalition, instead of the city, would help eliminate an administrative burden for Providence and lend a degree of neutrality to the navigator and consensus-building role that the coordinator would have to assume.

In 2010, the foundation made the first grant, of \$60,000, to the Coalition to fund the coordinator position. Representatives from the foundation, the city of Providence, and the Coalition, plus two other members of the stakeholder group, served as the search committee. The person hired to fill this role lived in Rhode Island, had been actively involved in Providence housing and weatheriza-

tion work for several years, and had been engaged in the stakeholder process. The first grant was followed by a second year of support at \$70,000 for the position in 2011. With this person in place, working closely with the city, the pace of work and progress accelerated exponentially.

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The foundation’s leadership did not continue to the same degree once the grant for the local coordinator was given. Foundation staff was involved in hiring the coordinator, continued to host meetings, and participated in some strategy discussions as the initiative evolved, but once hired, the coordinator took over operations and oversight of working groups. The Coalition to End Childhood Lead Poisoning placed high-level staff in Providence that advised the coordinator and helped shepherd the process, ensuring that Providence was maximizing its opportunities for accessing resources at the federal and national levels to undertake this work. Given the foundation’s multiple initiatives across six core interest areas, there was a need for thoughtful reassessment of its own capacity and level of engagement at different stages of the project. Assured that the local capacity to lead the project was in place and supported by local partners as well as a national network, the foundation could more readily adjust and recalibrate its role at this point in the initiative’s growth.

FIGURE 1 Blowing Insulation



Foundation Impact: Providence Green & Healthy Homes Initiative

In April 2011, Providence Mayor Angel Tavares and executives from the Rhode Island Office of Energy Resources, Rhode Island Department of Health, the Rhode Island Foundation, and the Coalition signed the Green & Healthy Homes Initiative Compact. By doing so, senior leaders in the city and state affirmed their commitment to the GHHI effort. The stakeholder group evolved into the Providence GHHI steering committee, which is made up of 31 organizations and 42 individual members and provides direct support for the planning and demonstration of GHHI Providence.

In addition to the steering committee, GHHI Providence established five working groups to provide active consultation, project troubleshooting, and support for the development of five key areas of the initiative:

- resources, “braiding,” and development;
- programming;

- data and evaluation;
- workforce development; and
- outreach and education.

Over the past year, the GHHI has focused on supporting Providence’s Department of Planning and Development’s launch of the Green & Healthy Homes Initiative Providence Neighborhood Innovation Pilot. This demonstration project was scheduled to exceed its goal of upgrading more than 125 Providence housing units to green and healthy standards by the end of September 2012. To maximize energy savings in these targeted homes, services frequently included “blowing insulation.” (See Figure 1.)

The pilot was designed to address some of the local barriers and deficiencies identified in the early stakeholder discussions. Included in the pilot program are:

- outreach and education services for residents in the targeted housing units, including a management of a team of resident educators respon-

sible for providing one-to-one resident-client education and case-management services to participating residents. This program component has been lacking in other service delivery systems and this strategy is designed to ensure that the benefits resulting from the housing interventions are long term and sustainable.

- **GHHI Auditor Services.** The residential Green & Healthy Homes auditor is responsible for conducting comprehensive pre- and post-intervention assessments, creating resident and administrative reports, and developing a scope of work for contractors. The audit includes diagnostic assessments for building energy efficiency, health, and safety. This program component is at the heart of the integrated approach and strategy for green and healthy housing interventions. Families living in these units experience a streamlined process with fewer disturbances. The audit also identifies the housing upgrades needed to satisfy health, safety, and energy deficits. Instead of having to apply for various financial assistance programs to get individual pieces of the work completed, residents have one comprehensive scope of work that will be satisfied by a pooled funding source and braided funding programs.

Financial Leverage

The foundation's two-year, \$130,000 combined investment has leveraged more than \$4.5 million in public and private funding for GHHI Providence. In addition, the initiative received innumerable hours of in-kind matches from partner organizations that continue to devote staff hours and other resources to this initiative. The primary resources for unit production of the pilot project include:

- \$850,000 (about \$6,800 per unit) from the Rhode Island Office of Energy Resources for all energy-efficiency upgrades,
- \$3.2 million (about \$10,000 per unit) from the Department of Planning's Lead Hazard Control program, and
- \$137,750 (about \$1,100 per unit) from the Coalition's grant with the Open Society Foundations.

This level of success exceeded initial expectations and was a direct result of the local coordinator, intermediary, and cross-sector collaborative structure in place to administer the program and leverage resources.

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Lessons Learned

More than 125 green and healthy housing units were on track for completion at the end of September 2012. In order to succeed, resources and programs have been braided together and service delivery has been coordinated. The way in which Providence administers its weatherization and healthy-home interventions has been altered. As the data and evaluation component of the initiative intensifies, the Rhode Island Foundation will be working with the GHHI Providence office and the steering committee to determine how the model can be expanded throughout the state. Conversations are under way on what that might look like and what resources would be needed. The foundation is asking the steering committee to assess why and how GHHI Providence is showing initial signs of success. At its core, the program shares all of the characteristics of a collective impact initiative as described by Kania and Kramer (2011):

... long-term commitments by a group of important actors from different sectors to a common agenda for solving a specific social problem. Their actions are supported by a shared measurement system, mutually reinforcing activities, and ongoing communication, and are staffed by an independent backbone organization. (para. 6)

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Summary of Lessons Learned

As the foundation strives for deeper impact, it will continue to reflect upon the experiences it is increasingly accumulating from collaborative projects such as GHHI Providence.

Lesson 1: Beyond Grantmaking

This initiative demonstrated that cross-sector involvement and engagement is critical to addressing community problems and achieving not just success, but optimizing the scope of that success. Before making a grant to support this initiative, taking on this project required the foundation to devote extensive staff time and resources. And, most important, it offered its position as a neutral and respected community leader to activate and build a coalition. Many people came to the first meeting simply because the foundation asked them to: This is a recognized dynamic and one that obviously should not be taken lightly or abused.

Lesson 2: Be Prepared to Adapt

The “right people” are not always in the room at the first meeting. The foundation decided that it was also OK to be honest about why someone was not included initially. The foundation is

learning about the project’s needs and possible partners in every conversation alongside the other partners at each convening. Nevertheless, it needed to be sensitive to those people and organizations that had long been working in the trenches and who were territorial about the issues and scope of work that GHHI was proposing to implement. The foundation may have the benefit of a long lens to view a problem, but those working directly on affordable housing, healthy homes, and energy-efficiency issues brought the practical detail and on-the-ground experience to the discussion. It was important that they were heard and recognized for their contributions.

Lesson 3: Prioritize Investment Into Local Capacity

In this case, the intermediary organization was based in Baltimore and had a national scope of work. Supporting the local coordinator position provided vital technical assistance, administration and program management capacity for the city of Providence, which was the driver of the demonstration project. The national presence of the Coalition was instrumental in providing the GHHI steering committee with the latest updates, requests for proposals, and experience being gathered across the country as other sites began launching “green and healthy” initiatives. Having a person on the ground who knew the principal players and levers to pull, and who was also the conduit for national information, was determined to be the best use of grant dollars, particularly in these first years of the initiative.

Lesson 4: The Importance of Connectivity

It may seem surprising that people in the same field have not met or have not worked with one another; yet it is for this very reason that the convening power of the philanthropic community is so valuable yet somewhat underestimated. Many of the stakeholders assembled at the initial convening learned for the first time that Providence had been looking at more efficient and productive ways to coordinate and deliver weatherization and lead-abatement services. City officials left that meeting with numerous follow-up calls and meetings to conduct. The foundation brought people to the table who were not necessarily the

“usual suspects” and, as a result, resources or information surfaced that would ultimately assist the city in the trial phase of this effort.

Lesson 5: Balancing Act

Taking realistic stock of the foundation’s role in this approach was critical. The foundation had to honestly ask itself: Is the initiative aligned with the foundation’s mission? What is the scale of commitment the foundation is prepared to make – convening stakeholders, project management, grant funding? Balancing the foundation’s mission and priorities with competing community needs and managing expectations were all part of the calculations in determining how much further and how deeply it would go with this initiative. This calculation should not take so long as to be irrelevant, however. Be decisive, commit, and follow through.

Lesson 6: Taking Risks

Calculated risks are still risks, but the scope and scale of the social problems the foundation and its partners were trying to solve requires that risk is tolerated and embraced. Coordinating and leading a second convening on the theme of green and healthy homes was a risk. Expectations for the foundation to commit financial resources in addition to staff and facilitation resources were higher with every action it took. The road map to achieve green and healthy homes was not yet designed and the challenges it presented were daunting. Yet here is where a foundation’s agility is one of its greatest assets. It is important to recognize when there is something of value and to cultivate it, even when it is not yet clear what shape it will take.

Although each situation will require the same serious consideration and balance of risk, cost, and opportunity before taking action, this effort offers an example of what a collaborative approach can look like and achieve. As the philanthropic sector strives to be more creative in its work and to have broader, deeper, and more meaningful impact in the communities it serves, let it continue to closely examine, explore, and in some cases duplicate the strategies offered through a collective impact and collaboration model.

Balancing the foundation’s mission and priorities with competing community needs and managing expectations were all part of the calculations in determining how much further and how deeply it would go with this initiative. This calculation should not take so long as to be irrelevant, however. Be decisive, commit, and follow through.

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