Community Capacity-Building: Lessons Learned From Our Partners

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Executive Summary

This report highlights three philanthropic efforts to build the capacity of local communities in the West - The Ford Family Foundation's Ford Institute Leadership Program (FILP), the Northwest Area Foundation's Horizons Program (Horizons), and the Orton Family Foundation's Heart and Soul Community Planning Program (Heart and Soul). Building community capacity can be one of the most powerful vehicles for change as local communities seek to address economic, social, or environmental challenges. The case studies in this report provide encouraging examples of how modest philanthropic investments can make a big difference in building community-wide capacity.

Each of these programs focuses on small, rural communities. The programs take different approaches, but overall, investments have been aimed at enhancing the problem-solving capacity of the communities involved. Horizons was designed to build community leadership to address poverty. Heart and Soul seeks to engage citizens in land use planning as a pathway to building stronger communities. FILP offers training courses to strengthen individual and organizational capacity, and ultimately promote community vitality. All three programs have covered multiple years, and have been financed by foundations outside these communities.

Despite similarities across these three programs, the programs differ in their approach to building community capacity as a core part of the program objectives. In the report, we present a continuum from "community capacity building as an end in itself" to "community capacity building as a means to a different end." For example, we discuss how the Horizons Program had the explicit objective of alleviating poverty, while building community capacity was a mechanism for achieving that end. The Ford Family Foundation's program, by contrast, has aimed at building community capacity from the start.

We learn several encouraging lessons through this analysis of the three programs. First, we learn that well designed investments in community capacity do work. All of these programs have been successful in building capacity at the local level. We also find that leadership and civic participation are critical elements to community capacity. Community capacity depends on leadership, and each of these programs involves some form of leadership development or training. Each program has also built the civic culture of their community in some way, such as increasing volunteerism or enhancing relationships among community leaders.

However, we also find some cautionary lessons through the experience of these philanthropic efforts. Foundations interested in funding this work may find that building community capacity does not always result in achieving the specific goals of the foundation. In other words, communities may choose to use their newly developed capacities on a range of issues that may or may not be aligned with the foundation's core objectives. We also find that including marginalized populations in community problem-solving may prove difficult and take a long time, and is best addressed by each individual community on its own terms. Finally, each of these programs demonstrates the reality that this work is long-term, and philanthropic support can be most helpful when it recognizes the longer time horizons necessary for producing and sustaining results.

Overview

For purposes of these case studies, the phrase "community capacity" is intended to capture the attributes that enable a place-based community to develop and implement solutions to public problems and pursue opportunities to improve community and individual well-being. We think of a community as having high capacity if it is generally able to address challenges or opportunities as they arise, bringing to bear either public or private resources as appropriate.

Why might community capacity matter to philanthropists? We offer three possible answers to that question, expecting that readers may suggest others.
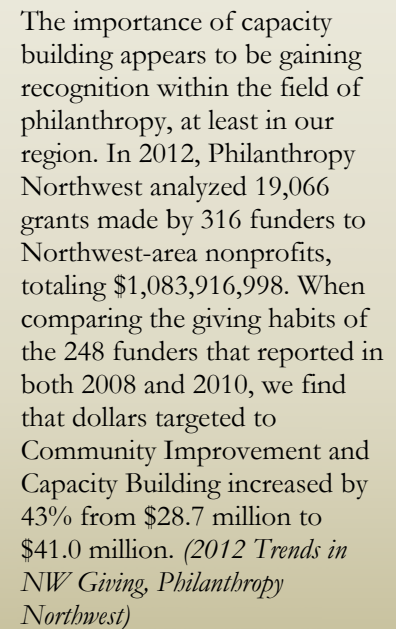
First, the problems and opportunities that communities need the capacity to address are very often the same ones that philanthropists choose to address. Whether it is poverty or livability, dropout rates or clean air, race relations or thriving ecosystems, a very broad swath of community challenges and opportunities overlaps an equally broad swath of mission-driven philanthropic activity. At the most basic level, then, those grantmakers whose missions overlap community priorities may sometimes choose to invest in community capacity as a way of advancing their own missions.

The importance of capacity building appears to be gaining recognition within the field of philanthropy, at least in our region. In 2012, Philanthropy Northwest analyzed 19,066 grants made by 316 funders to Northwest-area nonprofits, totaling $1,083,916,998. When comparing the giving habits of the 248 funders that reported in both 2008 and 2010, we find that dollars targeted to Community Improvement and Capacity Building increased by 43% from $28.7 million to $41.0 million. *(2012 Trends in NW Giving, Philanthropy Northwest)*

Local communities are not the only potential partners for advancing those missions, of course. In some cases, the resources of national or state governments are at least as important. But as those resources become ever more constrained, more of the burden is shifting to both philanthropists and local communities. That shift presents the second reason that philanthropists might choose to pay more attention to community capacity.

The third reason is considerably more general, but worthy of notice. Strong, vibrant, capable communities, to which their residents can lend their own capacities, are an important part of what sustains and gives meaning to human life. To the extent that philanthropy seeks to live up to its name, the "love of humankind" should always be devoting some of its resources to strengthening human communities.

Background of the Initiative

Philanthropy Northwest (PNW) and the Intermountain West Funder Network (IMWFN) have been working together to better understand the roles that funders can play – and are already playing – to help build the capacity of local communities in the West. Both of these regional associations have organized discussions about this promising and challenging arena within the field of philanthropy. These discussions have refined our understanding of the role of philanthropy in building community capacity. We have also frequently heard a suggestion that case studies of past or present philanthropic efforts in this arena would help focus and advance the conversation. This working draft is a first step toward responding to those suggestions.

Methodology

The three programs highlighted in this report are:

- The Ford Family Foundation's *Ford Institute Leadership Program*
- The Northwest Area Foundation's *Horizons Program*
- The Orton Family Foundation's *Heart and Soul Community Planning Program*

Each of these three foundations responded to a questionnaire which requested information and reflection about the program's purpose, approach, and lessons learned. The questionnaire asked respondents to examine the program from the perspective of community capacity-building, even if that term had not been an explicit part of the program's objective or theory of change.

In addition, each foundation supplied background material about the program, including formal external evaluations. We have chosen not to provide specific source notes for particular information about each of the cases. Please refer to the appendix for a listing of additional materials referenced in this report.

A Few Similarities and Differences Among the Three Cases

There are some significant similarities among these three cases. This has the advantage of enabling us to make apples-to-apples comparisons of the respective strategies employed, but it has the disadvantage of narrowing the scope of the study. For example:

- All three programs were multi-year in duration, for example. This clearly produced some benefits on the ground, but a foundation contemplating a "one-off" capacity-building effort might prefer a case study of that approach.

- These three projects all focus on small, mostly rural communities. They provide useful comparisons about capacity-building work in that setting, but tell us little about how to do that work in a large metropolitan area, or in a watershed or bioregion (such as the Greater Yellowstone Ecosystem).

- These three foundations all operate regionally, across fairly extensive geographies. By definition, this means that most if not all of the work is being financed from outside the foundation's home town. Would we learn different lessons if we studied capacity-building work undertaken by community or family foundations within their own communities?

The Ford Family Foundation's *Ford Institute Leadership Program*

The purpose of the Ford Institute for Community Building is to promote vitality in rural communities in Oregon and Siskiyou County, California. The Institute's programs are based on the belief that vital rural communities develop from:

- A broad base of knowledgeable, skilled and motivated local leaders
- A diversity of effective organizations
- Productive collaborations among organizations and communities

The Institute's primary method for achieving community vitality is through a series of training classes called the Ford Institute Leadership Program (FILP). According to the Institute, a typical class (about 25 participants) consists of a diverse mix of citizens with leadership experience ranging from emerging to seasoned. Participants represent the business, government, and nonprofit sectors. Since 2003, the Institute has selected four new communities to enter the program each spring and each fall. At this point, there are over 4,000 graduates of the program.

> FILP's theory of change is based on strengthening individual and organizational capacity as building blocks to the development of higher levels of community capacity. FILP believes that truly developing community capacity means fostering high levels of collaboration by supporting systems, structures and processes that allow individuals to come together to create shared visions, communicate broadly and effectively and to coordinate their activities.

FILP curriculum concepts include:

- Community capacity and social capital
- Personality types and leadership styles
- Community development models
- Catalytic Leadership Model
- Asset mapping

- Group development
- Models for group decision-making
- Communication strategies
- Volunteerism

Each class selects a project that they work on together (for example, a local park improvement). The project helps focus the course content on a real-world situation. The Institute provides up to a $5,000 match in support of the project. Participants are expected to volunteer outside the class to complete the project within one year.

The Northwest Area Foundation's *Horizons Program*

Horizons was designed to build community leadership and capacity to address poverty in small, rural and reservation communities in the states of Washington, Idaho, Montana, North and South Dakota, Minnesota and Iowa. Over a period of eight years, nearly 300 high poverty, small, rural and reservation communities completed the Horizons program. The program provided leadership training, focused conversation and learning about rural poverty, and coaching, training, and resources to help the participating communities take steps to address poverty. Over 100,000 people, close to 30% of the population of the participating communities, participated in the program.

The Horizons program evolved over the years, as the Foundation adapted it in response to what it was learning. The Foundation relied upon a number of intermediaries, or "delivery organizations" to work directly with the communities. In the later phases, those delivery organizations were mainly state Extension Services, based in land grant universities.

> Horizons was predicated on the theory that communities already possess many of the assets and skills to arrest social and economic decline, and can, with leadership training, resources and support, craft and implement a shared community vision to address poverty in meaningful ways.

The program involved the use of a study guide focused on poverty, which the Foundation commissioned from the Study Circles Resource Center, now Everyday Democracy. The Study Circles discussions were a vehicle for all sectors of the community to begin to understand and wrestle with community poverty – what it is, what causes it and what can be done about it. The Study Circles segment required 12 hours of discussion over a two-month period.

In addition, the Horizons program employed the "LeadershipPlenty" skill-building and training curriculum developed by the Pew Partnership for Civic Change. Participating communities were required to have a minimum of 25 persons completing the 30 – 40 hours of training.

At the conclusion of LeadershipPlenty, communities moved on to the Community Visioning phase, during which they were expected to engage at least 15% of the community in developing a plan to reduce poverty. A small stipend was available to assist with implementation of the community plan.

The Orton Family Foundation's *Heart and Soul Community Planning Program*

In 2008, the Orton Family Foundation launched a five-year initiative "to develop a new approach to values-based community planning." The Foundation describes Heart & Soul Community Planning as a way to "bring citizens back into the process of charting the future of their cities and towns." The Foundation also describes the program in terms of "helping citizens from all walks of life discover and protect their towns' heart and soul assets so that they can adapt to change while enhancing the attributes they value most."

The Foundation piloted the program in four communities in the Northeast and Rocky Mountain regions, where Orton focuses its work. Like the other two foundations being reviewed here, Orton has continually reviewed and refined its approach in later rounds of its community-building work. The Foundation is currently working in another five communities: Cortez and the North Fork Valley of the Gunnison River (includes the towns of Crawford, Hotchkiss, and Paonia), Colorado; Essex and Essex Junction, Vermont; Gardiner, Maine; and Polson, Montana.

Heart & Soul Community Planning rests on the premise that "when citizens and decision-makers are deeply and authentically engaged in values-based decision making and acting on those values, it produces vibrant and enduring communities." Heart & Soul is centered on the belief that a community can come to an agreement about a set of core community values and then can use them to improve planning and decision making. Values are defined as what people care most about in their community - the customs, characteristics and places that create a town's unique sense of place.

For purposes of this case study, the Foundation provided an external analysis and evaluation of its work in Golden, Colorado. As the Foundation summarizes that example:

"Residents came out by the thousands to discuss the future of their city at storytelling events such as block parties, chili socials, group story circuits and festivals as well as group story listening and community summits. The values identified by the process served as the starting point and philosophical guide for future comprehensive plan updates, neighborhood plans, land use decisions, code changes, and community investment decisions."

The Heart and Soul planning process includes: 1) a discovery and articulation of shared community values, 2) implementation of policies, regulations, institutions and traditions to enhance and protect agreed on assets, and 3) stewardship of those assets and characteristics through evaluation, accountability and regular review and reassessment of the assets and the health of the community. The Heart & Soul approach builds on innovative efforts in many disciplines including: values-based planning; consensus building; participatory democracy; citizen engagement; appreciative inquiry; and community development.
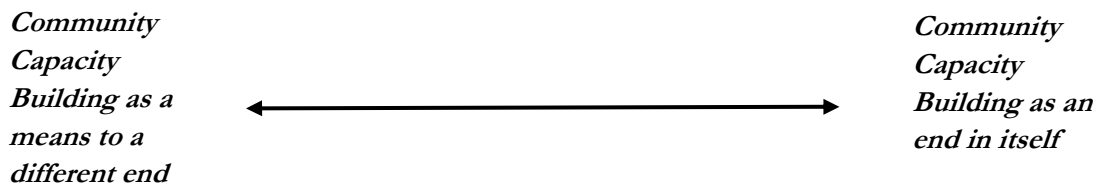
Building Community Capacity

Each of these approaches explicitly aims at enhancing the problem-solving capacity of the communities involved. A Horizons program evaluator, for example, writes that "in 2003, the Northwest Area Foundation launched an experiment to learn if impoverished, small, rural and reservation communities could build the leadership capacity to address and redress poverty." The Ford Institute Leadership Program brochure explains that the Institute's classes "focus on developing the community leadership capacity of individuals." And the Orton Family Foundation's website points out that, through its Heart and Soul program, "We help

small cities and towns describe, apply and uphold their heart and soul attributes so that they can adapt to change while maintaining or enhancing the things they value most." All of these programs, then, can quite legitimately be described as community capacity-building initiatives.

What is equally clear is that these approaches differ substantially from one another in many ways, including how they address the issue of community capacity. We think it is important to be clear from the outset that the purpose of this inquiry is not to identify or promote one ideal method of building community capacity. One of the great strengths of philanthropy has always been the variety of approaches that it brings to bear on any problem or opportunity. That variety is evident in these three case studies.

One of the key differences has to do with how central or focal the goal of building community capacity is in each case. Is it in the foreground or the background? Is it an objective in its own right, or is the foundation trying to enhance civic capacity *so that* the community can do a better job of addressing the particular problem or issue that the foundation cares most about?

In these terms, the three cases present an analytically useful continuum. The Ford Institute Leadership Program seems to be aimed squarely at building community capacity, without any more specific objective. The Orton Family Foundation's "Heart and Soul Community Planning" program engages citizens to identify and act on their shared community values (the community's "heart and soul") as a pathway to vibrant, enduring communities. This focus on improved community planning is a key element of Heart and Soul, but the Foundation makes it clear that the end goal is indeed "vibrant, enduring communities." The Northwest Area Foundation, by contrast, developed the Horizons program as a component of its overall mission of alleviating poverty within its region. Poverty alleviation remained the key objective of Horizons; building community capacity was essentially a means to that end.

Community Capacity Building as a means to a different end ⟷ *Community Capacity Building as an end in itself*

We would expect to find most foundation-supported community capacity-building work situated somewhere along this continuum. Knowing where you are on that continuum, and why, may be a key contributor to the success of any given program. We will have more to say about this in the discussion about lessons learned from these three cases.

Lessons Learned

All three of these foundations have been conscientious about learning lessons as they have proceeded with their respective programs, and redesigning the programs to reflect those lessons. They have all done this evaluative work internally, and they have all commissioned external evaluations of their programs. The lessons they have learned are therefore very extensive and detailed. Our account here will only focus on the

lessons that are most directly relevant to building community capacity. Rather than group those lessons program-by program, we will take a more thematic approach.

Encouraging Lessons

The broadest lesson, arising from all three cases, is that well-designed investments in building community capacity do work. They work in different ways in different circumstances, of course, but there is strong evidence that such investments can increase the capacity of a community to meet challenges and pursue opportunities.

We see community capacity being enhanced in a number of ways, across all three of these cases. Here are some of the most salient and encouraging features:

1) Leadership

Community capacity depends on leadership, in one form or another. It doesn't have to be elected or any other kind of formal leadership and it is probably best if the leadership is broadly shared. But communities depend on leadership of some kind to meet challenges and seize opportunities on a regular basis.

Both the Northwest Area and Ford Family foundation programs were explicitly focused on leadership development. Horizons employed the Pew Partnership's Leadership Plenty Program, while the Ford Family Foundation has created its own ongoing leadership development program. The Orton Family Foundation's Heart and Soul program is less explicit about leadership development, but it has been very aggressive about providing training in a broad range of techniques that are key elements of collaborative leadership.

Evaluations of these programs provide clear and convincing evidence that leadership capacity has been expanded because of the philanthropic investment. The external evaluation of the Horizons program put it this way:

> "Evidence clearly indicates that the program has been successful in identifying, training and supporting new leaders, building new and strengthening existing leadership capacity, mobilizing community participation and civic engagement. Can enhanced leadership capacity be built? The answer is a resounding yes."

In much the same vein, the Ford Institute evaluation concluded:

> "In summary, analysis of data collected from Spring 2009 to Spring 2011 participants shows evidence that effective community leaders are being developed by the Leadership Program. After the training, participants report experiencing significantly higher levels of competence in leadership skills and significantly higher likelihoods of engaging in leadership behavior than they had before the class. … The most common skills respondents reported using in those settings were those related to active listening, conflict resolution, running effective meetings, communication, and decision-making."

2) Strengthening civic culture

This is a more elusive component of community capacity than leadership development, but perhaps even more important. The evidence of success in deepening this form of community capacity is even stronger across all three programs.

Here is how a Horizons evaluator spoke of that program's success in these terms:

> "Horizons resulted in greater participation in civic affairs, from those who had previously not been active. Board and civic organizational participation and volunteerism increased, and persons new to leadership were elected into local office."

In a similar vein, the Ford Institute Leadership Program has found its graduates "more civically active than before." The Ford Institute evaluation also spoke of how that program has strengthened more subtle strands of civic culture:

> "The most common skills respondents reported using were those related to:
> active listening, conflict resolution, running effective meetings, communication, and decision making. The respondents who cited using active listening skills at some point during the four months of the … class talked about how they are now much better at listening fully and completely to others and waiting until they fully understand the points before formulating an opinion or a response. As one student respondent put it, 'When there is a disagreement with a group of classmates, I have learned to listen to what their point of view is and understand where they are coming from, instead of persuading them to see my point of view without giving them a chance to speak.'"

The evaluation of Golden, Colorado's Heart and Soul project reported that "project events connected people and built deeper understanding." The evaluation continued:

> "The Heart and Soul process is rich with opportunities for diverse individuals to come together in meaningful ways. [An official] mused about how that comes to life: 'Whenever you get a chance to get to know another person more than superficially, you really clarify your relationship. In situations where there is less trust, an open process like this builds trust, builds relationships, and builds community.'"

Offering greater detail about this contribution to civic culture, the Heart and Soul evaluation found that:

> "The project resulted in enhanced community relationships, such as improved trust and understanding between city decision-makers and Golden residents. For example, the Heart and Soul process built in project events that helped individuals listen and learn about the diverse perspectives of others. Groups of community members did the work of watching the stories. . . . Inevitably, people with different vantages developed richer appreciation for other perspectives."

There is one very particular lesson highlighted in this quote: the value of story as a way of strengthening civic culture and therefore building community capacity. We cannot go into greater detail here, but it is one of the most intriguing features of the Heart and Soul approach. Among other things, it opens up the possibility that foundations primarily interested in arts and culture may have far more to contribute to building community capacity than we generally assume.

3) Substantive outcomes

As we mentioned earlier, both Northwest Area Foundation and Orton Family Foundation were aiming less at building community capacity itself than at more substantive outcomes from their programs. Orton wanted better land use; NWAF was committed to poverty alleviation. Both foundations (and their evaluators) identified at least some success in these terms.

The Horizons evaluation, for example, found that:

> "Horizons has resulted in a deeper understanding of the causes of poverty, and a shared framework for understanding different forms that poverty can take. The program is continuing to change some entrenched attitudes about those who live in poverty. There is consistent evidence that communities can be supported- with tools and training- to focus on more systemic poverty issues."

In Golden, the Heart and Soul evaluator found that:

> "The project yielded a useable set of community values through a consensus-based process, and the city was successful in translating these community values into a thoroughly revised comprehensive plan."

These encouraging results on the substantive side are important to note, especially for those foundations whose interest in community capacity-building may be primarily for the sake of such particular mission-driven outcomes. This re-enforces what we suggested in the introduction: that "many varieties of philanthropic work would be supplemented and enhanced by strengthening community capacity."

Yet there are also complications that can arise from combining community capacity-building with the pursuit of more narrow and particular goals. We will examine some of those difficulties in the following section, along with other cautionary lessons that arise from one or more of these cases.

Cautionary Lessons

1) The community's work vs. the foundation's work

Most foundations have substantive missions of one kind or another. Relatively few of them identify building community capacity itself as part of their mission. As a result, many foundations that do give some attention to community capacity still keep their own missions at the heart of that work. This is entirely understandable, and it can undoubtedly produce beneficial results. Still, it is important to understand that this mission-driven approach to building community capacity can present substantial difficulties.

Among our three cases, those difficulties are most evident in the Horizons program. We cannot begin to do justice here to the very extensive and detailed external evaluation of Horizons. The broadest summary is that the program produced excellent (and from all indications sustained) results in terms of leadership development and in terms of building other forms of community capacity, such as new nonprofits. The program was also clearly successful in terms of deepening and broadening the *understanding* of poverty within the community. The results were less clear, though, when it came to the foundation's mission of *reducing* poverty. "Progress on poverty has been mixed," the evaluation concludes.

Without attempting to provide a conclusive explanation of this very complex case, we offer a hypothesis for the sake of inviting further analysis and discussion. Small, rural communities often face more problems than they have the capacity to address. Poverty is one of those problems, and it is an easy one for a community to overlook or actively deny. In those terms, NWAF's efforts to raise awareness of the sources and multiple dimensions of poverty were not only laudable, but quite successful. Yet most of these small communities were also facing other challenges, such as chronic declines in their traditional economic base, or the outmigration of young people. When Horizons appears on the scene and genuinely enhances the community's problem-solving capacity, it would be surprising if these communities, faced with such a broad array of challenges, would choose to focus that new capacity exactly where the Foundation had hoped that they would focus.

What this suggests is that community capacity may, by its nature, be a general-purpose phenomenon, not something that can be tailor-made for use on one particular problem or set of problems. This is an open question, to which these case studies invite our attention. It is possible, for example, that community capacity is inherently more of a general-purpose phenomenon in small communities than in larger ones, where the specialization of capacity is more feasible. On the other hand, as we expand our study to more urban settings, it might be advisable to keep this lesson in mind to see whether it also applies there.

None of this is to suggest that foundations should abandon their focus on mission when they work with communities. Horizons raised community awareness of poverty. It also built community capacity. What NWAF may not have done so well was to understand that these are two different activities.

The same might be true, but to a lesser extent, with the Orton Family Foundation program. The "heart and soul" of a community will very often be related to those special places and physical features that are of primary concern to the Foundation. But "heart and soul" can also be found in local culture, or in social relationships, for example. The good work of the Foundation in helping communities know themselves better may result in the "community planning" that the program aims for, but it might also take very different directions. In these terms, the Ford Family's Leadership Institute appears as the purest example of building capacity for whatever the community needs to do, not for what the Foundation wants it to do.

2) Including marginalized populations

All three foundations have sought to broaden the reach of their community-building programs, to involve minorities and other marginalized populations, and all have encountered some challenges in those terms. Horizons, for example, was considerably less successful on Indian reservations than in non-Indian communities. That experience contributed to a subsequent convening by NWAF of foundations seeking to learn how to operate more effectively in Indian Country. The Ford Leadership Institute reports that:

> "In an effort to better reach Hispanic residents, we have created an introductory class which helps 'break the ice' and serves as a recruitment vehicle into the full community cohort."

Similarly, in the Golden, Colorado Heart and Soul project we heard that, "The block parties were strategically located in low-income or neighborhoods with high numbers of rental units."

The Orton Family Foundation learned a deeper, more challenging lesson in this regard:

> "One thing the advisory team realized is that not everyone is ready to have a conversation about the town's future. They related it to Maslow's hierarchy of needs; some people at the chili social were

worried about where their next meal would come from and were put-off with the City's past efforts to seek input about future land-use decisions. The advisory team realized that in order to bring everyone to the table with an equal voice they'd need to help connect some residents to immediate need resources. When they tried and failed, they evaluated their efforts, created a new strategy then tried again."

This example of painful but patient learning may suggest a broader lesson. Most foundations bring to their work a highly laudable commitment to inclusiveness. When they work in communities, it seems entirely appropriate that they encourage and facilitate the inclusion of marginalized populations. But for a number of reasons, those efforts may fall short of what the foundation would like to see. In addition to trying new techniques, it may sometimes be helpful for the foundation to recognize that the full inclusion of these populations in community problem-solving is itself a community problem, which the community may have to address in its own time and on its own terms. But when that time comes, a community whose general problem-solving capacity has been enhanced will be better positioned to deal with this difficult problem.

3) Building capacity takes a long time

All three foundations indicated that one of the lessons they had learned is that this is long-term work. In the foundation world, that always means that there is a question of how to sustain the work long enough to produce lasting results.

The Horizons program may seem the least likely of the three cases to provide an answer, since NWAF is no longer funding the program. But that case actually provides one possible solution to the problem of sustainability. In its latter phases, the Foundation turned to the university-based Extension Service as its chief intermediary for working with Horizons communities. In several states, this partnership proved not only beneficial to NWAF and the Horizons communities, but to Extension as well. As the external evaluator put it:

> "The Horizons program has had a major impact on the ways in which Extension works with communities. In some cases, it has been transformative. … In virtually every Delivery Organization, those interviewed talked about how they had moved beyond the traditional expert delivery of information to selected audiences to learning how to work in partnership with the entirety of a community. This in particular has led them to include low-income community members."

One result has been that several of the state extension services have sought ways to continue the kind of work that they had begun in Horizons, even after foundation support had ceased. This may have been a fortuitous (and non-replicable) intersection of a mission-driven foundation seeking out an intermediary which was especially ready for a new way of working with communities. But it does suggest that working with intermediaries with ongoing ties to communities may be a valuable component of any community capacity-building initiative. It probably also underscores the value of doing this work through funder collaboratives, so that it is not entirely dependent on the programmatic decisions of any one foundation.

Another side-effect of the long time horizons of this work is that it makes it both more difficult and more important to measure the long-term effects of the work. That leads into the next section, focusing on the kinds of assistance that might be most beneficial to foundations involved in community capacity-building.

Implications for Supporting Organizations

These three case studies suggest a variety of forms of assistance that organizations like research foundations or regional associations of grantmakers could provide to foundations and other funders that either are already involved in building community capacity, or are contemplating such involvement. What follows is only a partial list of examples of such assistance; we welcome further suggestions.

1) Research and document the long-term effects of philanthropic investment in building community capacity. Foundations naturally want some assurance that investment in something as complex and intangible as community capacity will produce valuable results. This is especially challenging in an arena like this because, as we mentioned in the previous section, the work of building capacity takes more time than many other kinds of philanthropic work. Sound, reliable research into the long-term effects of philanthropic investments would be tremendously helpful. Some of that research may draw on quantifiable metrics, but more narrative evidence (from key informants, for example) can also be valuable.

2) Prepare a broader range of case studies. As we noted earlier, these three cases were chosen because some of their similarities provided apples-to-apples comparisons of strategies, strengths, and weaknesses. But that has meant that very different capacity-building venues, such as urban or watershed settings, remain to be studied, as do capacity-building efforts by foundations indigenous to the communities themselves.

3) Present the cases in a variety of formats. We hope that written case studies like these can be helpful to the field, but it would be even more helpful if they could be supplemented by other forms of presentation, including power point or videos.

4) Provide opportunities for face-to-face, peer-to-peer learning among those engaged in capacity-building work, or contemplating such engagement. This could include conference sessions, webinars, or other events.

Conclusion

The Ford Family Foundation, Northwest Area Foundation and Orton Family Foundation have provided three excellent examples of philanthropic investment in community capacity-building. They have also been very generous in providing background material and staff time to help us prepare these case studies.

These three cases provide strong evidence that well-designed and thoughtfully implemented philanthropic investments can substantially enhance the capacity of communities to solve problems and realize opportunities. The case studies provide valuable information about proven strategies for achieving such results. Perhaps of equal value, they also provide cautionary lessons about difficult passages that may be encountered by any capacity-building initiative, and they present a few examples of strategies or techniques that have not proven effective.

These three cases were never intended to be a definitive survey of the arena of community capacity-building. Aside from their intrinsic value, we hope they will elicit suggestions about additional cases of philanthropic investment that might also be studied, as a contribution to this expanding field of activity.

Case Study Authors

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Appendix: References

This case study draws on information collected from a questionnaire sent to all three foundations featured in this report. In addition, the foundations supplied additional materials, including brochures and formal or external evaluations. Those resources are listed below:

Ford Family Foundation's Ford Institute Leadership Program

1) Ford Institute Leadership Program brochure, www.tfff.org
2) Evaluation of the Ford Institute Leadership Program, 2011 Report, Prepared by Oregon State University, 2/9/2012

Northwest Area Foundation's Horizons Program

1) Northwest Area Foundation Horizons Program 2003-2010, Final Evaluation Report, Prepared by Diane L. Morehouse, President QED, 7/ 2010

Orton Family Foundation's Heart and Soul Program

1) Heart and Soul Community Planning Projects, Project Evaluation Findings- Golden, Colorado, Prepared by Peer Associates, Inc., 7/2011