THE NEIGHBORHOOD AND FAMILY INITIATIVE: ENTERING THE FINAL PHASE

An interim report covering the period November 1996 – December 1998

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August 1999
The Chapin Hall Center for Children at the University of Chicago was established in 1985 as a research and development center dedicated to bringing sound information, rigorous analyses, innovative ideas, and an independent perspective to the ongoing public debate about the needs of children and the ways in which those needs can best be met.

The Center focuses its work on all children, while devoting special attention to children facing special risks or challenges, such as poverty, abuse and neglect, and mental and physical illness. The contexts in which children are supported—primarily their families and communities—are of particular interest.

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• Primary supports, concerning the resources in communities that enhance the development and well-being of all children, but may be especially important to children who are poor or otherwise disadvantaged
• Community building, focusing on the development, documentation, and evaluation of community-building initiatives designed to make communities more supportive of children and families
• Schools’ connections with children’s services, primary supports, and communities, examining the range of institutions that foster children’s learning and development, including not only schools but also families, businesses, services, communities, and the relationships, actual and potential, among them
• International projects, covering Chapin Hall’s recent and growing involvement with children’s policy researchers and research centers in other countries
• Special activities and consultations, covering a range of projects, often undertaken in collaboration or consultation with other organizations
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INTRODUCTION
The Neighborhood and Family Initiative (NFI) is at a critical juncture: it has entered the final phase of Ford Foundation funding. After this period, NFI as a national demonstration will be over. What will be left, what will have been accomplished, and what will continue to develop in the wake of NFI as a formal initiative are the questions that participants are grappling with and attempting, through their actions, to answer.

Although the Initiative has been funded for almost ten years, the collaboratives in Detroit, Hartford, and Memphis are relatively young organizations, having recently become incorporated entities independent of their sponsoring community foundations. At the same time that Initiative funding and support is winding down, these collaboratives-turned-organizations are struggling to move beyond the start-up stage of organizational development. They are reviewing (and, in some cases, redefining) their goals and missions. They are seeking to identify and fill a particular organizational niche in their communities. They are redefining staff and board roles and seeking sources of support to maintain their organizational survival and continue various programmatic efforts.

The Milwaukee collaborative, which remains unincorporated and continues to work closely with the community foundation and under its umbrella, is trying to address similar issues for different reasons. In creating (or helping to create) new organizations responsible for the implementation of a broad range of development activities, the collaborative itself is seeking a niche and rationale for its continued existence.

In preparing this report, a few central tensions emerged that have an impact on each of the issues we will discuss. One concerns the question of support—technical assistance, information, advice, connections to resources—in the final phase of Initiative operation. What support can be provided, and by whom? To what extent can such support set the stage for the survival of independent organizations or the sustained effect of the activities and relationships set in motion by NFI?

Another tension concerns the question of role and organizational niche. The collaboratives have all defined themselves primarily as “facilitating” organizations rather than as service providers or developers. However, they are increasingly being pulled to consider direct implementation roles, both because of the relative availability of funding for programs as opposed to operational support and because of their desire to retain some ownership and control over programmatic initiatives they develop.

A third tension concerns attempts to engage significant resident participation and support community “empowerment” while developing nonprofit organizations with strong staff that function efficiently and can capture resources and implement activity.

This report is organized around seven issue areas that illustrate these tensions. The first section of the report focuses on issues of structure and operation, particularly as they are being experienced by the newly independent organizations in Detroit, Hartford, and

Acknowledgments
This paper is part of a series of reports to the Ford Foundation and NFI participants as part of the Chapin Hall Center for Children’s evaluation of the Foundation’s Neighborhood and Family Initiative. This report owes a great deal to the dedication and openness of the participants in NFI, and to the communities in which the Initiative is working. For their commitment to forging positive change and for their willingness to share with us their experiences, interpretations, frustrations, hopes, concerns, and beliefs, we are truly grateful.

Additional Chapin Hall staff whose work made this report possible include: Stephen Baker, Lisa Cohen, Paul Fagen, Genevieve Hebeka, Miao Ling Li, Anna Minkov, Sylvan Robb, Mark Toles, Amanda Toler.
Memphis. Next, we describe trends in programmatic activity across sites, followed by a discussion of the sites’ approaches to and experience with leveraging resources. In the following section, we explore the issues confronting the collaboratives in their attempts to define, in an enduring way, their role and organizational niche in their communities. The next two sections focus on cross-site support. In one, we discuss the structure of funding and the roles of the Ford Foundation and the community foundations as they have been evolving and their possible implications for the final phase of the Initiative. In the other, we highlight recent findings regarding the needs and dilemmas of technical assistance provision that might inform consideration of such issues during the next phase of activity. Finally, we discuss the issue of evaluation, highlighting some of the potential benefits and enduring dilemmas.

COLLABORATIVE STRUCTURE AND OPERATION

Over the life of NFL, all four collaboratives have exhibited a general tendency toward increased formalization in decision making and operations. By the end of 1996, Detroit, Hartford, and Memphis had taken this a step further by incorporating as independent organizations. With incorporation, the impetus for rethinking collaborative structure and formalizing its activities and operations was heightened. The incorporated sites hired executive directors and sought out new members to help reshape the structure and operation of the emerging organizations. During this period, these sites also devoted a great deal of time and discussion to operational issues. They developed internal management systems, reshaped committee structures, and tried to delineate the appropriate balance of responsibilities between collaborative members (who are now members of a board of directors) and staff.

Milwaukee, the remaining unincorporated site, faced a somewhat different set of operational concerns. As new organizations, the Detroit, Hartford, and Memphis collaboratives were attempting to address some fundamental issues surrounding their organizational newness. The Milwaukee collaborative, on the other hand, faced a struggle to define a continued purpose for its existence after having transferred responsibility for nearly all of the programs it developed to its spin-off organizations and other agencies.

Internal Management Systems

A number of the internal management issues faced by the newly incorporated collaboratives stem from the disjuncture between their formal status as independent organizations and their continued reliance on the community foundations to perform key management functions, such as establishing accurate accounting systems and providing up-to-date budget information. By the end of the period, only the Detroit collaborative had both incorporated and received its 501(c)(3) status. There, staff were able to develop and implement standard operating procedures and financial management systems, and the organization is able to apply for and receive funding independently of the community foundation. In contrast, Memphis still awaits approval of tax-exempt status, and both Hartford and Memphis remain dependent to some extent on their sponsoring community foundations. In the interim, the community foundations at these two sites provide the nonprofit umbrella under which the collaboratives may receive grant monies, and continue to hold ultimate legal responsibility for key management functions such as personnel and finances. Staff in Hartford also continue to rely on their community foundation for particular types of information, such as updated financial information.

Membership and Turnover

Historically, the development of collaborative membership has been guided by a simple matrix composed of three categories: residents (“grassroots leaders”), neighborhood professionals (“bridge people”), and representatives from public and private-sector
organizations in the larger community ("resource people"). Although all sites have maintained representation from each of these categories, each site has had a somewhat different relative emphasis with respect to whom they bring on board.

Neighborhood residents have been recruited most actively in Hartford and Memphis, while Detroit has focused primarily on bridge and resource members (see Table 1). Milwaukee’s membership has remained relatively balanced across all three matrix categories.

During this period, for the first time, people were forced to rotate off the collaboratives when their membership terms expired. In Hartford and Memphis, turnover was particularly high, and bridge and resource persons were generally replaced with neighborhood residents. Turnover rates at these two sites, more so than at the others, seem to have contributed to the difficulties in the management of these organizations and to growing tensions in board and staff relationships. In Hartford, 55 percent of current board members joined the collaborative since July 1997; in Memphis, nearly 86 percent are new since January of that year. This contrasts with 29 percent in Detroit and 31 percent in Milwaukee.

At least one contributing factor to the impact of the high rate of turnover on collaborative operations centers around the lack of adequate orientation procedures for new members. In many instances, acclimation to the board’s responsibilities, as well as its culture and relational dynamics, has been difficult, either taking a long time to establish or leading to withdrawal. In the end, several new members across sites became either “no-shows” at meetings or failed to actively participate in activities and discussion.

### Table 1

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Collaborative Composition and Turnover</th>
<th>Detroit</th>
<th>Hartford</th>
<th>Memphis</th>
<th>Milwaukee</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td># (%) of members by matrix category</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Grassroots</td>
<td>3 (18%)</td>
<td>6 (67%)</td>
<td>13 (59%)</td>
<td>11 (42%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bridge</td>
<td>5 (29%)</td>
<td>2 (22%)</td>
<td>4 (18%)</td>
<td>8 (31%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Resource people</td>
<td>9 (53%)</td>
<td>1 (11%)</td>
<td>5 (23%)</td>
<td>7 (27%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>26</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>% of current “new” members (as of Jan. 1997 or later)</td>
<td>29%</td>
<td>55%</td>
<td>86%</td>
<td>31%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Balance Between Boards and Staff**

When the collaboratives functioned as informal associational bodies, members generally had greater involvement in determining the focus of activities while the community foundations, through NFI staff, largely maintained control over day-to-day management. In a number of instances, this led to tensions between the two. Indeed, the decision to incorporate as independent organizations was in part driven by the collaboratives’ desire to gain autonomy from the community foundations. As a consequence, a number of the responsibilities that had been undertaken by community foundation staff were transferred to the new executive directors. In some sites, some of the prior tensions between the collaborative and community foundations have become tensions between members of a core group of board members and staff. This tension plays out in particular around two issues: management and expectations.

**Management**

A large part of the fundamental tension between core board members and staff during this period centered around differences in assumptions about the nature of the organization and the relative roles of board and staff. In Hartford and Memphis, for example, residents constitute the majority of board members and desire to have a more “hands-on” role, directly involved in the details of the organization’s activities rather than merely setting broad policy. In their attempts to ensure that the day-to-day concerns and needs of residents take priority in the organization, and that residents are not left out of any large-scale plans the collaborative may undertake, board members at these sites have had a tendency to “micro-manage” the work of staff. This has been less an issue in Detroit, where...
there are fewer resident participants and where there has developed a fairly clear consensus around DNFI following the model of a nonprofit service organization.

Executive directors have attempted to reconcile differences between themselves and their boards either by focusing a small amount of time and resources on activities of special interest to particular members of the board or by tailoring staff communication to the board such that their autonomy and ability to take action is less likely to be constrained by board deliberations over particular details. Board members may thus be provided with limited information or overwhelmed with details of the organization’s activities.

**Expectations and accountability**

Beyond the issue of board and staff roles more generally, much of the conflict between the two stems from a basic lack of clarity about expectations for staff performance and lines of accountability for monitoring it. Across sites, scant criteria exist for evaluating staff performance. In several cases, staff have expressed grave concerns and dissatisfaction with both the process employed and the tools used (and not used) to conduct their evaluations. In the absence of a systematic approach to judging the value of their work or an up-front agreement on the areas that would be assessed, executive directors have sometimes found themselves vulnerable to randomly chosen indicators to judge their performance and the impact of their work.

Compensation is a related concern. Executive directors have voiced concerns over the disparity between board expectations for their performance and what the collaboratives were willing to pay. By the end of this period, these issues seemed to be contributing to an increasing level of burnout among directors of NFI organizations.

**PROGRAMMATIC ACTIVITY**

For the most part, NFI in each site has continued to center its activities around the strategic foci identified in earlier stages of the Initiative. The level and scope of programmatic activity across sites, however, has changed over time. Prior to 1994, the sites were largely focused on organizational issues, including the form and ground rules employed to govern collaborative operations. Some important core projects were developed and a number of smaller efforts were supported, but largely this was a period of organization.

Between 1994 and 1996, the focus of activity shifted and the sites devoted signifi-
icantly more time to program development. The collaboratives generated and developed new project ideas through their existing committee structure, and took advantage of opportunities arising in their respective environments to leverage program activity.

Toward the end of 1996, the balance of activity began to change as the collaboratives turned once again to organizational issues. At this time, the Ford Foundation discontinued funding for programs and shifted its focus to provide solely for core operational support. The collaboratives allocated all funds carried over from the previous period to then-nascent or existing programs. All programs developed and implemented since that date have been funded by outside sources. As a general result, less collaborative time and energy has recently been spent generating and developing new ideas, while more attention has been given to building on existing projects and to identifying funding and program opportunities arising in the NFI neighborhoods and cities.

The influence of these factors on the level and scope of programmatic activity plays out differently across sites. In Milwaukee, programmatic activity burgeoned, primarily due to the work of the Martin Luther King Economic Development Corporation (MLKEDC), an organization created and spun-off by the collaborative. Most of this new activity was developed in partnership with the city’s Business Improvement District (BID) as part of its Cluster Project, a commercial and residential development project that targets a 16-block section of the neighborhood. In addition, the Milwaukee collaborative tried to find an implementing structure for its two ongoing leadership development efforts.

In Detroit and Memphis, overall programmatic activity increased slightly. The Detroit collaborative has taken on responsibility as lead agent for the development of the Community Self-Sufficiency Center, an employment and training program funded under the city’s Empowerment Zone program. It has also continued to support and adapt its two main projects, New Beginnings and the Back to Basics Partnership, and has developed two new small-scale summer programs, a jazz series to provide outreach to seniors in the neighborhood and a youth development and leadership program.

New Memphis program activity largely focused on a series of small-scale projects around its neighborhood safety and beautification goals. These include advocacy efforts, such as a petition to repave a major thoroughfare, and the reestablishment of a police mini-precinct in the neighborhood.

Higher levels of programmatic activity were achieved in the sites where staff were supported in their efforts by board members with influence, and where there were relatively low rates of staff and board turnover.

The collaborative here also continued to implement its two core products, Leadership Orange Mound and the Orange Mound Connection. In addition, the Orange Mound Development Corporation (OMDC), another organization created under NFI with a new board and staff, has continued to acquire property, and build or rehabilitate houses in a targeted area of the neighborhood.

In Hartford, most programmatic activity was suspended as the collaborative tried to broaden its linkages with organizations within its target neighborhood and those adjacent to it, and while the collaborative experienced significant staff and board membership turnover. Nearly all activity beyond that focusing on internal organizational issues was devoted to its community organizing focus (particularly block-club development) and to continued support of a few ongoing projects.

Responsibility for program planning, development, and implementation is increasingly falling on staff working with a small base of collaborative members, generally members of the executive or steering committee. Higher levels of programmatic activity were achieved in the sites where staff were supported in their efforts by board members with influence, and where there were relatively low rates of staff and board turnover.

The extent to which collaboratives were successful in connecting to opportunities for program development arising in their local
environments seems to be both a function of collaborative priorities and organizational capacity. In the past two years, MLKEDC in Milwaukee has been most successful in this regard, in large part by forging partnerships with other organizations already working in this area.

**Programmatic Approaches**

An overview of both new and ongoing programs shows that the collaboratives are using three different approaches to supporting programmatic activity: (1) funding and direct implementation of discreet projects, (2) transferring implementation responsibilities to spin-off organizations, and (3) seeking to facilitate networks of organizations to pursue such activity.

**Funding and direct implementation**

The collaboratives have attempted to concentrate effort and increase impact in many cases by focusing on fewer, larger-scale, or longer-term projects such as the Community Self-Sufficiency Center in Detroit or community organizing in Hartford. They are either using their resources to implement projects themselves (to date largely focusing on neighborhood connection and leadership development), or to fund other organizations to do so. As funding continues to diminish and the collaboratives are increasingly pressed to leverage resources for their own organizational survival, they are increasingly limited in their ability to fund the work of other entities. Recognizing that many funders prefer to support specific programs and activities, with only a small percentage of grants designated to support operations, the collaboratives are led to consider implementing more projects themselves rather than funding other organizations to do so.

**Transferring implementation responsibility to spin-offs**

The second approach to supporting programs has been largely pursued by collaboratives in Memphis and Milwaukee, which have transferred responsibility for the implementation of some of the projects they have developed to organizations they created or helped to create. In Memphis, the collaborative created a CDC, the Orange Mound Development Corporation (OMDC), to focus on housing development and home ownership. In Milwaukee, two such organizations were created. MLKEDC was developed initially to house a revolving loan fund and has expanded into the areas of housing, employment, and economic development. In addition, the collaborative joined with several other organizations to form the Northeast Milwaukee Industrial Development Corporation (NMIDC) in order to oversee the redevelopment of an industrial park.

To varying degrees, the collaboratives in these sites have continued to provide these organizations with core operational support, and have tried to maintain a monitoring and oversight role through overlapping board membership and reporting requirements. However, as participants change over time and as collaborative funding diminishes and spin-off organizations turn increasingly to outside funding sources, the collaboratives progressively lose their ability to influence program development and implementation.

**Facilitating networks of organizations**

The third approach to supporting program development activity focuses on the collaboratives’ attempt to operationalize their role as “facilitating organizations” by developing a range of interorganizational relationships and partnerships. This represents a shift away from a focus on product and specific outcomes to one of developing processes and networks. The Back to Basics Partnership in Detroit and the Orange Mound Roundtable in Memphis are examples of such efforts. For the collaboratives, this strategy creates a broader organizational base from which to plan activity, tap into existing resources, and catalyze change. Some of the challenges of this approach (to be explored in greater detail later) include the need to negotiate differing organizational goals and priorities and to address and clarify questions of ownership and accountability.
LEVERAGING FINANCIAL RESOURCES

With the 1997 announcement of a final round of Ford Foundation funding for the Initiative, the sites have experienced increased pressure to leverage funds in order to sustain themselves, in basic dollars and cents, over the long term.

The collaboratives have generally not had a great deal of experience in this area, and efforts to leverage funds remain a challenge. Although most collaborative members recognize and articulate the need to raise money to support the organization, they readily admit both to limited knowledge of resources available and few organizational efforts to connect to them. Although from the beginning Ford suggested the NFI grant was to be viewed as seed money, the sites were never required to raise additional funding, and are only now grappling with this need in any concerted way.

In addition, the composition of collaborative membership has shifted over time such that, in a number of instances, the collaboratives have lost members with instrumental connections and access to resources beyond those provided by Ford. This has been the case for the Hartford and Memphis collaboratives, where there has been a general trend to recruit more “grassroots” residents to the board and a tendency toward not replacing “bridge” and “resource” members with individuals having similar connections.

Even in cases where nominating committees recruited members with expertise in financial areas (such as grant writing and fundraising), the collaboratives have not found a way to harness these skills. There seem to be several reasons for this. First, the collaboratives have focused much more time and energy on operational issues, and new members and the skills they bring have sometimes gotten “lost in the shuffle.” Once on board, new members seldom receive the type of orientation necessary to assess where they fit and how they might contribute to the organization as a whole. In a number of instances, newer members did not become laboratives have lost members with instrumental connections and access to resources beyond those provided by Ford.

Table 3
Summary of Financial Resources Leveraged by the Collaboratives and NFI-Affiliated Organizations (Approximate)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Site</th>
<th>Before 1996</th>
<th>1996 - 1998</th>
<th>Sources</th>
<th>Purposes</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Detroit</td>
<td>$750,000</td>
<td>$619,674</td>
<td>Seedco, DMC-JTPA, Skillman, Lower Woodward Corridor Fund, Jewish Fund, EZ, United Way</td>
<td>Housing dev., New Beginnings, summer jazz series, Self-Sufficiency Ctr., Youth Olympics, Genesis dev.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hartford</td>
<td>$621,491</td>
<td>$324,354</td>
<td>Urban Act, City-CDBG, HFPG, St. Francis Hospital, misc. donations and grants</td>
<td>Artist’s Collective, PEPY, econ. dev., Summer Youth Program, Block Watch Org. PSC</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Memphis</td>
<td>$420,927</td>
<td>$550,246</td>
<td>OMDC-CHDO, Orange Mound Fund, Memphis Comm. Dev. Ptshtp., Seedco</td>
<td>Housing, Home Repair Loan Fund, small grants</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Milwaukee</td>
<td>$960,850</td>
<td>$1,025,152</td>
<td>Milw. Fdtn., Grow America Fund, Nat. Econ. Dev. &amp; Law Ctr., Milw. Arts Board, corp. sponsors, Seedco, MLKEDC and NMIDC</td>
<td>Revolving Loan Fund, MORE, Boston City Year, comm. mtg., housing and industrial redev., Mad Money, Cluster Project</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Includes interest earned.
part of the core group of influential members that drive collaborative activity, and many of the financial resources and expertise such newer members brought with them during this period have so far gone untapped.

Finally, in many instances the collaboratives either lack the expertise and staff needed to successfully leverage financial resources at the level required to support the organization beyond Ford Foundation funding, or they have been unable to focus a sufficient amount of the organization’s resources toward such activity. Although in a number of instances executive directors have attempted to hire staff (or contract out services) to build the organization’s capacity to this end, they have generally not been supported by their boards to do so.

**Strategic Responses**

The collaboratives have had several responses to the increased pressure to leverage financial resources brought on by the announcement of the final NFI grant. One response has been, in effect, to “slow down the clock” by extending the grant period for the final round of Ford funding. The NFI sites differ with respect to the length of time—ranging from two to four years—over which they have chosen to spend the last NFI grant. Longer grant terms provide more time to develop the organization’s skills and capacities to leverage financial capital; they may also give the collaboratives more time to put off addressing the issue of raising funds in any concentrated way. To encourage the collaborative to develop skills in this area sooner rather than later, the community foundation in Memphis established a matching requirement for the final NFI grant; each year the collaborative is required to raise an increasing dollar amount prior to being able to draw down NFI funds from the community foundation.

A second response the collaboratives appear to be employing to alleviate the pressure to leverage resources is to restrict the scope and focus of activity toward particular areas. Here, the collaboratives tend to question the use of any funds not directly targeted to areas identified as key to the organization’s survival.

A third approach has been to create, with unspent NFI program money, funding mechanisms in the community to support programmatic activity over the longer term. The Lower Woodward Corridor Fund in Detroit, the Revolving Loan Fund in Milwaukee, and the Orange Mound Fund in Memphis are examples of this strategy.

Finally, collaboratives have tried to develop the organizational capacity to raise funds from other sources. During this period, the collaboratives attempted to distribute more ownership and responsibility for raising money to board members, and in each site at least one committee was charged with primary responsibility for fund development. However, these committees are primarily at the planning stage with respect to implementing a development plan.

**Areas of Success**

Despite the challenges described above, the collaboratives have, over time, experienced at least some success in leveraging funds. Their experience presents different patterns, both with respect to approach and levels of success. Sites with formal 501(c)(3) mechanisms in place through which to leverage resources, or where the community foundations have been actively involved in the fund development process, have been more successful in this area.

For example, in Memphis and Milwaukee, the majority of additional funds leveraged have gone through their spin-off organizations, OMDC, NMIDC, and MLKEDC. In some cases, particularly in the case of OMDC, these organizations have struggled to build the organizational capacity needed to effectively implement their activities and manage the money leveraged. During this period, OMDC, for example, underwent significant restructuring of its board, membership, organizational leadership, and financial management procedures in an effort to balance the organization’s capacity to get funding against its ability to manage it and implement its project commitments.

Milwaukee, also through its spin-off organizations, has leveraged the largest amount of funding of the four sites and has drawn from the most diverse funding base. In addition to public-sector money, Milwaukee has leveraged relatively more private-sector funding, in part because of strong support from the community foundation.

In Detroit, the collaborative initially focused exclusively on leveraging funds pro-
vided to NFI through the program-related investment fund managed by Seedco, which were used to support several housing development projects providing for both affordable and mixed-income units. Since 1997, DNFI has focused less on serving as a pass-through for funding for other organizations and increasingly on soliciting funds to implement its own activities and programs. It has had some initial successes in this regard, perhaps most significantly with the organization’s selection as the planning agency for the development of a self-sufficiency center under the city’s Empowerment Zone, which carries with it up to $100,000 in reimbursement for administrative costs to DNFI.

In Hartford, with the exception of its success in helping to leverage $500,000 in state-funded Urban Act dollars for development of the Artist’s Collective, a cultural enrichment and community arts center located in the neighborhood, the collaborative has recently experienced only limited success in raising funding for its own activities. Over the years, the collaborative has received from the city a number of small grants to support its community outreach and economic development activities, but due to a number of operational factors (absence of staff, transitions in leadership, shifting priorities and goals) the organization has not always been able to draw down these funds. Accurate financial accounting systems and up-to-date budget information appear to pose a particular challenge in Hartford. In a number of instances, significant gaps exist between the organization’s projected budget—which reflects funds expected from external organizations—and the actual funds received, beyond those from the Ford Foundation, in any given year.

The funds raised by the sites have largely been restricted to provide support for particular programs. Because of this, there is a fundamental tension between the “facilitating” role the collaboratives have chosen for themselves and the pressure to abandon that niche in favor of a more direct implementation role in order to generate program dollars that could also help support core operations.

Because of the greater availability of restricted program funding, there is a tension between the “facilitating” role the collaboratives have chosen for themselves and the pressure to abandon that niche in favor of a more direct implementation role in order to generate program dollars that could also help support core operations.

ROLE AND ORGANIZATIONAL NICHE

All four collaboratives, whether incorporated as independent organizations or continuing as informal governance groups, define themselves as “facilitating organizations” whose principal purpose is to support the work of other organizations by helping to secure grants, provide technical assistance or staff, and facilitate neighborhood planning processes. Part of the rationale for choosing this intermediary role is that it allows them to build on a role they have historically played without requiring a dramatic change in their current organizational structure or capacity.

The collaboratives’ ability to play a facilitating role depends in large part on their connections to groups and organizations in their target neighborhoods and beyond, and on what they can bring to such connections. The collaboratives are, to varying degrees, building both formal and informal relationships with other organizations. Formal relationships are generally structured as funding agreements in which each participant is contractually responsible for providing particular resources or services, or for performing particular tasks. Informal relationships generally require a lower level of defined commitment and tend to be developed for the purposes of exchanging information, identifying common needs and interests, and planning.

Two issues have emerged as the collaboratives have attempted to develop such interorganizational relationships. One concerns differing organizational goals and priorities; the other focuses on questions of ownership and accountability.

Organizational Goals and Priorities

Many of the organizations that the collaboratives are trying to work with have different
strengths and priorities. Relationships with such organizations work better when they are engaged within a clearly defined project that is central to the work of the participating organizations and when each organization has obvious contributions to make to specific components of that work. For example, the Cluster Project in Milwaukee is an ambitious commercial and housing development project being implemented through a partnership of four organizations—a city agency and three CBOs (including MLKEDC)—in which responsibility has been delegated to each of the four partner organizations based on its particular interest or expertise.

In cases where there is ambiguity about the product or the relative responsibility of the participating organizations, or when priorities shift due to external factors, tensions have been created among them that have either delayed or hampered program development. For example, early in the current reporting period, DNFI entered into a partnership with a local CDC to launch an economic and industrial development project. As the collaborative became involved in other activities, its capacity to focus on this project as well was compromised, and its focus shifted away from it. This created tensions between DNFI and the CDC.

Ownership
The issue of “ownership” has arisen in a number of cases in which the collaboratives have transferred responsibility for implementation of programs developed or funded by the collaborative to another organization. In some cases, particularly in Milwaukee, the project plans or ideas are transferred to organizations that the collaborative has helped to create. In transferring responsibility, the collaboratives have given up direct control of the ongoing organizational process and the products it creates. In other cases, projects developed by the collaborative are transferred to existing organizations, sometimes accompanied by changes in the scope, intent, or structure of the project. For example, a leadership-development project created by the Milwaukee collaborative was transferred to another nonprofit organization for implementation. In so doing, the collaborative essentially removed the project from its immediate agenda, only to conclude two years later that it was not adequately serving its target of neighborhood residents.

The collaboratives are attempting to address this issue either by withdrawing from such relationships and taking on direct responsibility for implementation, or by attaching specific conditions to the grants they award, such as regular reporting requirements on progress toward the accomplishment of specific benchmarks.

Broader Linkages
Beyond (or in some cases as part of) the attempt to develop specific relations with other organizations, collaboratives have attempted to tap into the opportunities provided by the several public and private developments in their cities. These developments include the federal Empowerment Zone and Enterprise Community programs, as well as a variety of local developments. Given the collaboratives’ stated roles as “facilitators,” these developments present both unique opportunities and particular challenges. In some cases, in order to gain access to these resources, the collaboratives must enter into competition with the very organizations they are trying to convene.

In all sites, the collaboratives have had a role in the planning stages of many of these developments, generally by organizing meetings and providing staff to support the planning process. With the possible exception of DNFI, which may have an ongoing role in the implementation of one of the Empowerment Zone programs, and of MLKEDC in Milwaukee, which is a central partner in the Cluster Project, the sites have not generally been able to connect in any lasting way to these developments. Their challenges in this regard seem connected both to organizational capacity and access.

Regarding capacity, the collaboratives have a volunteer membership and relatively
small staff structures. Because many of them have limited expertise in particular areas of development (such as housing, economic development, and job training), they are limited in their ability to develop plans and implement projects. Although their role and broad purview place them in an advantageous position to facilitate the planning process, they often do not have the staff support, skills, and technical expertise needed to conduct feasibility studies and construct development plans. Some directors have attempted to build larger and more specialized staff structures to address this issue, but have largely not been supported by their boards. Others have entered into partnerships with organizations that have such expertise.

Regarding access, collaborative connections to larger developments and opportunities have historically been made by collaborative members or staff through their networks of association. As discussed previously, over the course of the Initiative collaborative membership in most cases has shifted to facilitate increased participation by grassroots and bridge people and to ensure greater connections to people and organizations within the target neighborhoods. As a consequence, they may have less direct access to resources beyond the neighborhood. Even when these contacts have been established, the collaboratives often have been unable to take advantage of them. There is now a general sense among NFI participants that the collaboratives are not well connected to, and therefore cannot influence or benefit from, major developments occurring in their neighborhoods and cities.

**Current Challenges**

The collaboratives seek to be facilitating organizations that help catalyze community development efforts and foster connections among organizations and between them and neighborhood residents. The main qualities they bring to bear on this role exist by virtue of their participation in a national initiative. Because NFI has provided the collaboratives with an ongoing, dedicated stream of funding from the Ford Foundation, access to the skills and expertise of cross-site technical assistance providers, and varying levels of access to broader resources through the community foundations, they have not had to compete with other organizations for external resources. Thanks to their access to funding, they have also been able to channel funds to other organizations, or to develop programs that they could then transfer to others for implementation. Finally, as an initiative of the Ford Foundation and a local community foundation in each site, NFI has had a relatively high profile that supported the interest and involvement, over time, of a range of participants. The final Ford Foundation grant will be expended over the next two to four years, and the collaboratives in three sites are increasingly operating independently of the community foundations. The very conditions that have allowed the collaboratives to develop this role are now disappearing.

As the sites enter into the final NFI grant period, they are considering what added value they bring to the work of other organizations. They are also considering how well they are positioned to garner the resources they need to play the intermediary role they seek, or to what extent they will seek to develop and implement programs themselves.

**FUNDING AND INSTITUTIONAL AUSPICES**

NFI was conceived as a four-site demonstration project, funded by the Ford Foundation and implemented through the agency of four community foundations.

**The Ford Foundation**

Over the course of the Initiative, the Ford Foundation has played several key roles. It has acted as the principal designer and central funder of NFI, supported a number of cross-site technical assistance providers, facilitated cross-site communication and information sharing, and funded a national...
implementation study to follow out the progress of the Initiative over time. Although Ford has played these roles throughout the course of the Initiative, both the focus and intensity of its engagement have shifted over time, in large part due to staff turnover and changing institutional priorities.

Around 1996, the Ford Foundation increased its level of active engagement in the Initiative in several ways. It expanded the number of staff working on NFI, conducted two rounds of site visits, and increased its level of informal contact with the sites. It also hired a consultant to act as an intermediary and conduit for information, supported the Cross-site Council to facilitate better and more frequent communication with and among the sites, and organized several meetings and conferences of participants. In addition, the Ford Foundation reconfirmed the community foundations as their grantees and initiated two iterative proposal-writing processes to help guide the development of local evaluation plans and proposals outlining sites’ plans for the last phase of the Initiative.

These efforts on the part of the Ford Foundation served to address a number of issues and concerns that had been expressed by participants in the prior period. First, it brought clarity to questions related to the continued role of the community foundations in NFI (particularly in the sites where the collaboratives had incorporated as independent organizations) and the length of Ford’s financial commitment to the Initiative. Second, particularly through the proposal-writing process, it helped push the sites to clarify their goals and expectations. Finally, through the Cross-site Council and the cross-site sharing conferences, it helped the sites identify and begin to address common technical assistance and resource needs, particularly in the area of organizational development. Issues and concerns that are common to the four sites but that remain unanswered include assistance in the identification of local resources, additional funders, and technical assistance providers.

With its final award, however, the Ford Foundation has lost much of its leverage to influence the sites, and appears to be disengaging from active involvement in the Initiative. It has reduced its staff support for the Initiative, ended support for a cross-site consultant, and is phasing out support of the centrally provided institutional support partners. Although it maintains its role as the institutional auspice for the Initiative and the entity to which remaining cross-site technical assistance providers and the community foundations are ultimately accountable, NFI participants now have few expectations of the Foundation and its staff.

The Community Foundations
Ford’s clarification of the community foundations’ central position in the Initiative, the award of the final grant, and the incorporation of the collaboratives in three of the sites has also led to a shift in the community foundations’ roles and relations. In Detroit, Hartford, and Memphis, the community foundations are moving away from their role as engaged “partner” toward that of a more traditional funder. They are limiting their role in the collaboratives’ deliberations and removing themselves from their formal decision-making processes. For example, with the exception of Milwaukee, community foundation executives have withdrawn their vote. They are also increasingly restricting their role to the administration of the Ford Foundation grant, and are exercising more structured control over program monitoring and funds disbursal. For example, in Detroit and Memphis, funds to the collaborative are disbursed on a biannual or quarterly basis according to an approved annual work plan and contingent on the accomplishment of commonly agreed upon benchmarks. Given the more traditional funder-grantee relationship in Detroit and Memphis,
and increasingly in Hartford, the collaboratives are having to demonstrate their ability to meet their stated goals and produce results. Furthermore, the community foundations in these three sites are pushing the collaboratives to develop their organizations so that they can successfully compete with other organizations for non-NFI funds available through them.

On the one hand, these developments have led to increased clarity of the relative roles and responsibilities of each partner, eliminating many of the tensions that existed with regard to the collaboratives’ ability to operate independently of the community foundations. On the other hand, there is no longer an expectation by most collaborative members that the community foundations will provide additional resources or facilitate broader linkages that may be crucial to their continued survival as independent organizations. At the same time, there is a level of disillusionment among community foundation executives based on their experiences with NFI that may limit their willingness to continue to commit time and resources to the collaboratives beyond the term of the Initiative.

**TECHNICAL ASSISTANCE**

As the Initiative has progressed, there has been an increased need to support technical assistance (TA) providers that are more accessible and responsive to the particular needs of the sites. To address this issue, in their 1996–1998 proposals, the sites were asked to assess their own technical assistance needs and allocate resources from their general operating budget to pay for such assistance. In addition, the Ford Foundation supported more individual technical assistance providers that would be available across sites around a wider array of specific issues.

At least two key issues emerged in the provision of technical assistance during this period: difficulties matching TA to needs and local circumstances, and challenges centering around clarity of roles and the lines of accountability for individual TA providers.

**Matching Technical Assistance to Local Needs and Circumstances**

Despite the wider array of technical assistance providers across sites and the increased flexibility for sites to choose technical assistance providers at the local level, issues arose surrounding adequately matching technical assistance to local needs. In some instances, the magnitude of the technical assistance provided for in particular areas did not match the magnitude of the need itself. In other instances, technical assistance was provided for in areas where a clear, identified need did not exist.

Perhaps the most critical need that was insufficiently met concerned technical assistance around leveraging resources (e.g., partnership development, grant writing, fundraising, marketing). Rather than intensive assistance working with individual sites, technical assistance around this issue has generally been limited to specific events (e.g., an afternoon fundraising retreat or a marketing workshop). For example, Ford provided for consultant presentations at cross-site conferences in Chicago (1996) and Memphis (1998). At the local level, meetings and other activities devoted to this topic were, when held at all, infrequent, one-time events that rarely followed up on the work presented at the conferences or advanced beyond introductory stages.

In a few other instances, technical assistance was provided in areas where a clear need was not identified by the sites. This was the case, for example, with the provision of TA around implementing a computer project. Perhaps one of the very first challenges the TA provider encountered was the need to “sell” the collaboratives on the utility of the project given a lack of consensus among participants. Some sites saw the technical assistance as an opportunity and were able to take advantage of the resources provided. In Memphis, in particular, the combination of
It has sometimes been difficult to tailor TA to the specific cultures and capacities of the collaboratives, and technical assistance providers were sometimes caught between multiple clients and ambiguous lines of accountability.

In addition to matching TA to need, technical assistance providers were sometimes challenged by the particularities of local circumstances—differences in organizational culture and capacity of the collaboratives themselves. TA providers were not always flexible enough to adapt their services to site-specific needs or to the particular organizational context under which the collaboratives were operating; in others, collaboratives were not always prepared to incorporate TA providers’ suggestions or learn from their work.

For example, at a board retreat in Milwaukee, the impact of technical assistance around board and organizational development was hampered by lack of clarity concerning the organization’s status. Although the collaborative in Milwaukee continues to exist as an informal structure operating under the auspices of the community foundation, the consultant’s approach to technical assistance around board development was designed for and best suited to formal boards of independent nonprofit organizations. Soon after the retreat began, questions arose concerning the collaborative’s status and what it meant in terms of its functioning, charge, constituency, and relationship to the community foundation and other institutions in the neighborhood. These questions could not be resolved within the organizational development framework provided by the TA provider.

In another case, the Memphis collaborative had been attempting to address a number of organizational development issues, especially tensions surrounding the appropriate balance between board and staff roles, lines of accountability, and differences in opinion about the “kind of organization” the collaborative should be. Although a consultant was selected to help the collaborative work through these issues and streamline the work of the organization, no consensus on a solution was reached. After several months and significant incurred expense, the board still had not adopted the bulk of the recommendations made and agreed to at the retreat.

Accountability
In addition to issues regarding matching TA to needs and local circumstances, technical assistance providers were not always clear about the primary client for their work, or the lines of accountability that existed. Ambiguity about accountability to various NFI “clients”—collaboratives, staff, community foundations, Ford—has been a challenge to the provision of technical assistance in NFI for some time. Technical assistance providers have not always been successful at interpreting the lines of accountability at the site level, sometimes resulting in disregard, delay, or discontinuation of their work.

For example, when the public relations firm of Lipman and Hearne was enlisted by the Ford Foundation to help the collaboratives develop a marketing brochure for fundraising purposes, they initially identified a small group of participants at each site to provide feedback on the project. But when a (nearly final) draft of the product was unveiled, a number of participants claimed they had never had the opportunity to give input on the project. Lipman and Hearne believed it had performed appropriately, with openness, and to the satisfaction of its principal client, the Ford Foundation. But although a review process was put in place, many collaborative members expected more of an opportunity to provide feedback, and their reaction ultimately delayed the project.

For the final phase of NFI, Ford has made a specified pool of money (beyond core funding) available to each site to support its technical assistance needs. In at least three of the four sites, these funds are being held in a separate technical assistance fund at the community foundation. As responsibility for the selection of technical assistance providers falls increasingly on the sites, one major challenge will be the extent to which they can identify their specific needs and select
the right providers, as well as the extent to which such support will effectively build the ongoing capacity of the collaboratives.

In spite of these difficulties, there are instances where the provision of technical assistance has met the needs of the sites. For example, in the first half of 1997 the MLKEDC worked with two local technical assistance providers recommended by the Milwaukee Foundation to develop its administrative and financial management systems. The technical assistance providers were selected based on their expertise in non-profit management and their familiarity with the organization. During a six- to nine-month period, they worked closely with staff and board members to review MLKEDC’s policies and procedures and develop systems or tools that were both tailored to the needs and realities of the organization and could immediately be put to use. These included a human resource policies handbook for employees, a grant monitoring and reporting schedule, revised position descriptions for staff, and an initial draft operating budget.

EVALUATION

Evaluation in NFI has been structured with the intent to foster two levels of learning. At one level, NFI was set up as a “demonstration” project to provide lessons about the possibilities and limitations of a particular approach to supporting comprehensive, locally driven community development. The lessons about principles and practice provided by NFI as a multi-site demonstration were to be developed for a broad field of funders, policymakers, community development practitioners, and researchers. This is the responsibility of the national evaluation conducted by Chapin Hall.

The second level of learning is local, and is the purview of the local assessments. Here, evaluation activities were to focus on local implementation and outcomes, providing both formative feedback to the collaboratives on progress toward goals and information on the impact of their local efforts.

Over the course of the Initiative’s implementation, the two-tiered evaluation has faced several challenges. First, there has been a degree of confusion among participants about the division of labor, focus, and responsibility of each tier, as well as their relationship to each other. Second, the national evaluation has informed the broader field but has been less useful for sites. Third, local evaluations were slow to get started, have been uneven across sites, and have been plagued by problems of evaluator selection, turnover, and limited resources.

Over the course of the current reporting period, there has been a renewed emphasis on local evaluation, due to the Ford Foundation’s provision of dedicated funding and technical assistance, and to the selection or retention of local evaluators who provide greater continuity and a sharper focus on collaborative progress. Memphis and Hartford, for example, have retained evaluators who have a long history with the collaboratives’ work, have worked with the collaboratives to identify a set of questions to pursue, and are following clear plans that guide their work.

However, long-term commitment to local evaluation is unclear and remains better grounded in some sites, and around some issues, than in others. In addition, to a large extent they continue to focus disproportionately on process rather than outcome issues.

We have learned a lot over the course of the Initiative about a range of strategic and implementation issues. Where the real limitation remains, and where the fundamental challenge over the last phase of funding resides, is on understanding with any degree of detail the outcomes of the NFI processes and activities (at the individual, organizational, and neighborhood levels) for the purposes of both local participants and the field at large.

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The Problem of Understanding Outcomes

There are several barriers to understanding outcomes in NFI, particularly neighborhood-level outcomes, which are the ultimate tar-
gets of change for the Initiative. Some of these barriers are technical; others speak to incentive, motivation, and perceived usefulness.

One barrier is a lack of clarity regarding goals and outcome expectations. Although collaboratives have elaborated some goals in clear and actionable ways (particularly to the extent they are connected with specific projects), many of the goal statements remain at a very general level. A local “theories-of-change” evaluation approach attempting to connect strands of activity to neighborhood change goals was not consistently engaged, and the use of “logic models” guided by COSMOS (the TA provider for local evaluation) is relatively new. In some cases, attempts to understand outcomes rely largely on collaborative members’ perceptions of success toward outcome goals; in others, the outcomes to be measured—“leadership skills,” “capacity building”—are too broadly labeled to provide guidance on how to recognize them.

A second barrier concerns data limitations. Because of the lack of clarity about outcome goals, very little baseline data on the neighborhoods was collected at the Initiative’s inception. Exceptions include the mapping of facilities, organizations, and land-use of the neighborhood in Detroit, and the fielding, in Memphis and Hartford, of a neighborhood household survey to measure the perceptions of residents about their neighborhood, its assets and needs, and their knowledge and opinions about NFI early in its existence. (There are no current plans, and no resources allocated, to readminister the survey.) For other issues, it is possible to create baselines by reviewing some data retrospectively, but there are some complications inherent in this. Although there are existing data collected periodically by city agencies and other local organizations that speak to potential neighborhood-level outcomes, many of them require (sometimes difficult) negotiation with agency personnel. They also tend to be collected based on different units of analysis over different periods of time, or are collected very infrequently.

A third difficulty has to do with aligning expectations with likely outcomes. The overarching goals for NFI (as a whole and as articulated by each site) are broadly and ambitiously stated and concern fundamental neighborhood change. Yet much of the programmatic activity, at least taken piece by piece, is relatively traditional, narrow in its scope, and targeted to particular sets of outcomes (more jobs, better services, functioning block clubs) and relatively few people given the population of the neighborhoods as a whole. Given this, neighborhood-level change is unlikely to be noted over the short term—and, despite the length of time the Initiative has been running, much of the programmatic activity, with some notable exceptions, has been short-term. Recognition of this fact has fostered a reluctance to collect data that focuses on neighborhood-level change.

Finally, there is the difficulty of attributing causality. Even if neighborhood-level change could be identified through analyses of these data, attributing such change to the work of NFI is extremely difficult given, for example, the existence of other activities in the neighborhood seeking to effect similar kinds of change, the influence of policies and activities beyond the neighborhood, and the lack of attention to reasonable comparison communities.

Building Understanding from the Ground Up

Given the difficulties outlined above, what can be done to maximize learning from NFI to inform both participants at each site of their progress and the broader field of applicable lessons provided by the Initiative and its outcomes? One approach is to focus largely on systematic program documentation, following out the various component projects sponsored or supported by NFI to understand their conduct, specific outputs, and program-level outcomes. In cases where such outcomes are at the individual level (e.g., job training or leadership development activities), understanding outcomes requires follow-up with program participants. In cases where such outcomes are sought at the organizational level or at the level of interpersonal or interorganizational relations, understanding outcomes requires attendance to organizational change or to mapping such relations, their content, and their effect over time.

Accomplishing even this fundamental level of documentation and analysis can be challenging and resource intensive, particularly given the range of activities, organizations, and relationships that are arguably taking place as part of the broader NFI agenda.
Although tracking such program-level outcomes is at least part of the intent of local evaluations using the logic model as an organizing technique, evaluation is expensive, and local evaluators may be attempting to cover too much for too little, and are relying, in some cases, on thin data (e.g., sparse documentation) to draw their conclusions. In trying to cover both progress toward outcome goals and process issues as they arise, local evaluation resources are further stretched.

One way to address this may be by decentralizing as much of the data-collection responsibility as possible to the implementing organizations and component projects, which can be supported (financially and technically) to collect data during the normal course of their administration. In Milwaukee, for example, the former local evaluator worked with the “spin-off” organizations to collect program data for their own self-assessment and to enable them to report to the collaborative on their activities. In Memphis, program documentation was made a condition of collaborative financial support for at least one program.

There are difficulties here, too. Organizations and individuals differ in their ability to put in place and maintain (even simple) information systems, and the incentives for their doing so are not always clear. Even when the responsibility to do so is understood (i.e., as a condition of an NFI-provided grant) and interest and commitment is present, dedicated resources and consistent and ongoing technical assistance may be necessary for quite some time.

Regarding neighborhood-level outcomes, it is possible to begin to collect and review existing administrative data from a number of local sources that describe aspects of each neighborhood and that are collected periodically, so that an approximate baseline can be established and compared to more current data. This seems to be part of the rationale for the cross-site collection of neighborhood-level data by local evaluators (facilitated by COSMOS), though this task does not appear to be addressing change in indicators over time. Such data collection can be organized by focusing in particular on issues that are targets of change for the collaborative. Neighborhood-level changes noted can then be compared with knowledge of program-level outcomes and of the other activities that are being supported beyond NFI’s efforts. This can help make some informed claims about NFI’s role in promoting change. It may also help clarify what reasonable expectations for neighborhood-level change might be in efforts such as this.

Information can be a powerful tool for planning, advocacy, fundraising, and evaluating progress for the purposes of short-term course correction and the development of broader, summative lessons. The difficulty is in incorporating the collection, analysis, and use of information into the process of planning and implementation in relatively easy and straightforward ways. Because NFI is now in its final phase of funding as a national initiative, there may be fewer incentives for trying to tackle these difficult evaluation questions. At the local level, evaluation questions are only likely to be addressed if the organizations that NFI leaves behind expect to survive, recognize the value of engaging in such activities, and are supported, financially and technically, to do so.

CONCLUSION

The challenges that confront NFI today are ones of sustainability and impact. Much of the focus on addressing these issues is on leaving behind an organizational capacity to carry on the work that NFI began.

Toward this end, the collaboratives have become independent organizations in three sites. In Milwaukee and Memphis, other new organizations have been created to take on a sustainable planning and implementation role around particular neighborhood development issues. In the three cases where the collaboratives have incorporated, organizational survival has become a threshold issue; whatever is to carry on will need to do so under the auspices of the collaboratives as functioning nonprofits. In Milwaukee, where the collaborative has not sought independent organizational status, its focus need not be on organizational survival. Here, the question is whether it needs to continue to operate or has effectively “worked itself out of a job,” as some early respondents suggested it would.

As new organizations, the collaboratives see themselves largely as “facilitators” rather than implementors, but their ability to sustain such a role is made complicated by several factors. First, the conditions that have posi-
tioned them to play this role—indepen
dent funding for their own operation and to fund
the work of other organizations, stature and
visibility as part of a national demonstration,
access to a broad range of supporting
resources like PRI funding and technical
assistance—will largely end with the end-
ing of the Initiative. Second, they are likely
to continue to be pulled away from this facil-
itating role by the threshold need for orga-
nizational survival and the fact that funding
is largely available for programmatic efforts
rather than to support operational or facili-
tating tasks. Third, they are developing in
very different local contexts, in which the
availability of such a “niche” role may be in
question. In Memphis, for example, where
there are relatively few community-based
organizations in the neighborhood, the need
may be more keenly felt for an organization
that can develop community consensus
around priorities and implement develop-
ment activities on its behalf rather than for
one that plays a less hands-on implementa-
tion role. In Detroit, in contrast, where
there are a number of actively functioning neigh-
borhood organizations that implement pro-
grams (and in some cases see themselves in
“facilitating” roles as well), finding the role
that adds value and is accepted over the long
term by the existing organizational players
may be more difficult, particularly to the
extent the collaborative is seen as a com-
petitor for funding and influence.

The intent to create and sustain func-
tioning nonprofit organizations may also
complicate the desire to develop them as
vehicles for community participation and
resident “empowerment.” In order to com-
pete in the nonprofit marketplace, organiza-
tions need to convince funders of their orga-
nizational stability, their competence in
managing funds, and their ability to account
for expenditures and outcomes. Although
having neighborhood representation on
boards of directors is an important criterion
for establishing organizational “legitimacy,”
for the most part it is less fundamentally
important to funders, whether government
agencies or private foundations, than orga-
nizational competence. This is certainly not
to say that resident-driven organizations can-
not also be competent, well-functioning
organizations. It does, however, require
strong and supported staff, and the develop-
ment of a clear organizational mission and a
track record for pursuing it. Resident partic-
ipation, organizing, and empowerment activ-
ities are harder to find funding for, particu-
larly to the extent that they have political
implications (as they often do). The tensions
between notions of resident participation,
democratic decision making, and staff
authority, and the degree of membership and
staff turnover encountered in those sites most
intent on developing resident-driven orga-
nizations, make their survival as organiza-
tions more difficult unless these tensions can
be more successfully negotiated.

With the apparent withdrawal of active
participation from the Ford Foundation, and
the still-open question of continued support
from most of the community foundations,
these challenges become even more critical
in the final phase of the Initiative. Although
the level of core financial support is clear and
some aspects of technical assistance are in
place, there may be value in a more concert-
ed final-phase involvement on the part of the
foundations to help further discussion and
reflection within and among the sites on issues
such as resource development and staff train-
ing, or to identify additional sources of assis-
tance and support and help make connections
to them. It remains unclear how much of this
is necessary, possible, or likely given shift-
ing priorities and commitments across sites.
SUMMARY OF SELECTED FINDINGS

Collaborative Structure and Operation
Management issues and tension between board and staff come from:

• Disjuncture between formal organizational status and continuing reliance on community foundations.
• High turnover rates of board and staff.
• Lack of training/orientation procedures.
• Tension between “working board” and “policy board.”
• Unclear expectations/mechanisms of accountability.

Programmatic Activity

• More new programs have been developed in sites with low turnover rates and where staff had the support of board members.
• Greater availability of program funding is leading collaboratives to consider implementing projects themselves.
• Collaboratives lose influence over programs when spin-offs turn more to outside funding sources.

Leveraging Financial Resources

• The sites were never required to raise additional funding before and, therefore, are only now seriously struggling with it.
• Collaboratives have lost members with connections to financial resources and have not harnessed the financial skills of new members.
• Sites with formal 501(c)(3) mechanisms in place or where the community foundations have been involved in fund development have been the most successful in raising outside money.

Role and Organizational Niche

• The ability to be “facilitators” has depended on connections to Ford and the community foundations and the resources they provide.
• Relationships with partner organizations work best when the project and each organization’s contribution is clear.
• Volunteer membership and small staff structure limit the collaboratives’ ability to plan and implement complicated projects connected with big developments.
• Connections to these developments have been made by individual members. As membership changes, these connections may be lost.

Funding and Institutional Auspices

• With the announcement of its last round of funding, the Ford Foundation has lost much of its influence over the sites.
• The community foundations are moving toward a more traditional funder role. This has fostered clarity in the relationship, but most collaborative members no longer expect additional support from the community foundations.
Technical Assistance

- It has been difficult to tailor TA to the cultures and capacities of the collaboratives.
- TA providers have often been caught between multiple clients and ambiguous lines of accountability.
- A major challenge continues to be the extent to which the TA that is being provided will contribute to building the capacity of the collaboratives.

Evaluation

- The challenge over the last phase of funding is in understanding the outcomes of the NFI processes and activities.
- Because NFI is now in its final phase of funding, there may be fewer incentives to tackle difficult evaluation questions.
Robert Chaskin is Research Program Director at the Chapin Hall Center for Children at the University of Chicago. His work focuses primarily on the role of community and community-based efforts to improve the lives of children and families.

He is principal investigator for the national evaluation of the Ford Foundation’s Neighborhood and Family Initiative, for a series of studies on approaches to neighborhood-based governance as a mechanism to promote community development with a focus on improving the lives of children and families, and for an exploration of the issue of “community capacity” and how it can be operationalized and measured. Mr. Chaskin has directed research and written papers on the issue of defining neighborhoods for neighborhood-based change strategies, was involved in the documentation of an attempt to create a new community based on the tenets of New Urbanism, and has been involved from its inception in the conceptualization of and attempt to create an “information infrastructure” in local communities.

Prior to these projects, Mr. Chaskin directed an assessment of Save the Children’s STAR youth development program and the Lilly Endowment’s Research Grants Program on Youth and Caring, and has written on the issue of school-linked services and alternative approaches to connecting children with services in local communities.

He has oversight responsibility for Chapin Hall’s international work and is the chairperson of Chapin Hall’s Community Area Working Group. Mr. Chaskin holds a master’s degree in anthropology and a Ph.D. in sociology, both from the University of Chicago.

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Ms. Dansokho has a Master of Agriculture from Oregon State University and a Master of Public Administration from the University of Illinois at Chicago.

Carla J. Richards is currently the Transition Manager for the City of Boston’s Empowerment Zone program. As a Senior Research Analyst at the Chapin Hall Center for Children, she served as field director for the national evaluation of the Neighborhood and Family Initiative. She also co-directed the documentation of the West Humboldt Park Education Network, a ten-year community-based school partnership involving thirteen Chicago Public Schools, a bank as the intermediary partner and funder, and a host of other service providers and community-based organizations.

Ms. Richards holds a master’s degree in Public Policy (MPP) from the Harris School of Public Policy Studies at the University of Chicago and has been engaged in doctoral study there through the Department of Education, where she focused on issues of partnership development, implementation, and maintenance across diverse institutional settings.
Related Chapin Hall Publications

The Ford Foundation’s Neighborhood and Family Initiative: Toward a Model of Comprehensive, Neighborhood-Based Development
Robert J. Chaskin

The Ford Foundation’s Neighborhood and Family Initiative Building Collaboration: An Interim Report
Robert J. Chaskin and Renae Ogletree

The Ford Foundation’s Neighborhood and Family Initiative Moving Toward Implementation: An Interim Report
Robert J. Chaskin and Mark Joseph

The Ford Foundation’s Neighborhood and Family Initiative The Challenge of Sustainability: An Interim Report
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