

Summary Assessment Report

The
Planning Phase
of the

Rebuilding Communities Initiative

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July 1997

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RCI Planning Phase: Summary Assessment Report

Introduction

Children who live in distressed urban neighborhoods - places with high rates of crime and violence, severe unemployment, widespread poverty, poor housing, and weakened systems of family and social support - face tremendous risks and disadvantages that can only be overcome by the most resilient and fortunate among them. Recognizing that the neighborhood environments in which children live profoundly affect their life prospects, the Annie E. Casey Foundation (AECF) launched a new initiative in 1993 to help transform troubled neighborhoods into safe and supportive environments for children and their families. This seven-year demonstration program, the Rebuilding Communities Initiative (RCI), was designed to provide support to five low-income neighborhoods in five cities - one each in Boston, Philadelphia, Washington, Denver and Detroit.

The OMG Center for Collaborative Learning is serving as the program's independent evaluator. This Summary Assessment Report on the Planning Phase highlights: 1) RCI's goals and structure and its relevance as one of an expanding array of comprehensive community initiatives now underway nationally; 2) the critical role that AECF played in framing and guiding the Initiative thus far; 3) features of the five communities participating in the Initiative; 4) progress made on the key tasks of the Planning Phase; and 5) the broader lessons that RCI offers for the field, together with some recommendations for RCI's subsequent phases.*

*For a more complete account of the assessment findings and recommendations, see the *Assessment Report: The Planning Phase of the Rebuilding Communities Initiative*, available from the Annie E. Casey Foundation or the OMG Center for Collaborative Learning.

1. Overview of the Initiative

At the core of RCI is the assumption that improvements in the quality of the neighborhood can have significant benefits for the children and families who live there. The RCI strategy is to foster positive changes in many different domains so as to achieve a comprehensive improvement in conditions for children and families over time.

Underpinning this strategy are two types of program goals: (1) those directly related to the experiences and well-being of children and families, and (2) those concerning the organizations, institutions, public services and social relationships that, in well-functioning neighborhoods, provide essential supports for community residents. These latter goals constitute what have come to be called the "systems change" goals of the Initiative.

In each of the neighborhoods participating in RCI, AECF aims to build on existing revitalization efforts to achieve comprehensive community reform. It provides support to each neighborhood through designated lead community-based organizations (CBOs). This support is to be used by these organizations to create or strengthen local collaborations as they plan and implement projects within five key areas identified by AECF as critical to achieving the goals of the Initiative.

Five Critical Areas of Change Within RCI:

- Maximizing capacity and impact of neighborhood resources and institutions;
- Developing an effective neighborhood-based human service delivery system for children, youth and families;
- Reforming existing investment streams to maximize positive neighborhood impacts, and increasing public and private capital investments in the neighborhoods;
- Improving housing, physical and social infrastructure; and
- Strengthening the capacity and effectiveness of neighborhood governance collaboratives.

In January 1994, the program's Planning Phase began with \$160,000 planning grants awarded to the five CBOs below who were selected based on past accomplishments and their potential to provide leadership in neighborhood revitalization. These grants were intended to enable the CBOs to design strategic plans that would guide the Initiative's later stages, and engage other collaborators in comprehensive assessments of each communities' needs and opportunities. Additional grants of up to \$1.5 million were to be awarded to those sites that developed feasible strategic plans. These funds would support skill-building, partnership development, the initiation and refinement of program interventions, and further strategic planning during a subsequent three-

year Capacity-Building Phase. In the final three-year Demonstration Phase of the Initiative, the grantee organizations and their collaborators would have an opportunity to plan and manage a demonstration of neighborhood capacity in some combination of the five critical RCI areas - taking some aspect of their community-building work to scale.

CBOs Selected to Take the Lead in RCI

Although the Initiative's goal is to benefit entire communities, one CBO in each of the five neighborhoods was selected to take the lead in the Initiative. The grantees are:

- Dudley Street Neighborhood Initiative (DSNI), a grassroots coalition in Boston's Roxbury/Dorchester neighborhood. Less than two miles from downtown, this poor but culturally diverse community has 24,000 residents.
- Germantown Settlement (GS), an established human service provider for Philadelphia's Lower Germantown neighborhood, northwest of Center City. Its 40,000 residents are predominantly African American.
- Marshall Heights Community Development Organization (MHCDO), a well-established CDC in Washington DC's Ward Seven. Its 73,000 residents are nearly all African American, and the neighborhood contains some of the poorest and most neglected areas in the District, along with a significant population of stable homeowner families.
- NEWSED Community Development Corporation, a CDC active in economic development on Denver's Westside working to improve La Alma/Lincoln Park, a very poor, largely Latino neighborhood of 6,600.
- Warren/Conner Development Coalition (WCDC), an area-wide association of community development, human service, and business organizations serving the entire Eastside of Detroit. The 75,000 residents in the primary target area are predominantly low-income African American, with some Whites living in segregated neighborhoods.

Selecting the Five Sites

During the start-up period, after the Foundation had established the broad outlines of the Initiative, it began to search for prospective sites for the demonstration. The site selection process was carefully designed, with distinct stages and explicit selection criteria.

The three stages of the process required a significant number of activities. The first stage entailed getting input from informed sources with a perspective on national community revitalization efforts to arrive at a select number of eligible low-income neighborhoods, located in cities with potentially supportive city governments, and with typical characteristics of national low-income neighborhoods. Stage two involved arriving at finalist sites by gathering information efficiently, from various city and neighborhood sources, about the neighborhoods to determine how well they matched the qualifying criteria; another activity involved assessing the likelihood that longer term partners would be found, both locally and nationally, in addition to those already in the neighborhoods. Stage three was the selection and recommendation of up to six sites for planning grants, which entailed site visits and very careful review of

grant applications.

The selection criteria used were grouped into three clusters - need, capability and readiness. Need criteria included that the neighborhood be formerly robust and stable, with deterioration and disinvestment evident in housing, social services, businesses and job availability; in addition, the neighborhood would contain a large percentage of poor families, high rates of unemployment, underfunded or overwhelmed social service systems, and a crumbling physical environment. Capability criteria included the presence of an improvement initiative underway in the neighborhood, with engagement of residents, key organizations and institutions; the presence of a mature and stable neighborhood-based organization as the clear leader of the improvement effort; and a track record of organizing in support of social, economic and environmental change among key leaders and residents. Readiness criteria involved the presence of local government support for neighborhood revitalization and for some of its governance; movement of neighborhood residents and organizations toward building a comprehensive focus for the improvement initiative underway to address the social and economic needs of children and families; and a resident population with stakeholders able to serve as strong leaders and models in the improvement initiative.

Although the five CBOs and sites chosen were quite different from one another, all conformed with the selection criteria used.

The Foundation's Role

As the Initiative's funder, AECF strongly influenced how RCI developed, initially through its framing of the demonstration and then through its management and coordination of the sites' activities during the Planning Phase. Prior to the commencement of the Planning Phase, AECF made critical early decisions about the goals, direction and operation of the Initiative; undertook a site identification and selection process; and conveyed the Initiative's purposes to each of the sites as part of its awarding of initial planning grants. During the Planning Phase, AECF continued to shape the Initiative through a "hands-on" guiding role that directly involved the Foundation staff as site coordinators; it also sponsored several cross-site conferences, and ensured that all the sites had access to technical support consultants.

RCI staff provided the sites with broad guidelines for the Planning Phase, which included detailed descriptions of the principal areas of activity that the Foundation expected the five communities to engage in. A detailed document was prepared which set out expectations in six areas: (1) engaging residents in the planning process; (2) forming a collaborative neighborhood governance structure; (3) positioning the community for reforms; (4) developing a community-building agenda; (5) participating in national Rebuilding Communities activities; and (6) developing a written plan for implementing the community building agenda. Expectations in each of these areas were further defined in the grant application guidelines and reinforced in a set of indicators which AECF proposed to use to assess each site's readiness for

the Capacity-Building Phase. Although it had provided such written guidelines, AECF was regularly asked by the sites to provide further clarification and more specific guidance about what the RCI plans should include and how the local process should be organized. At the same time, some technical assistance providers and members of AECF's own staff expressed concern that the goals of the demonstration were overly ambitious and urged that it should focus in on a more limited range of goals and strategies against which success could more easily be measured. Although staff now acknowledge they might have provided more early direction and support to the sites in interpreting and responding to the guidelines, they believe the guidelines themselves were clearly stated and that it was essential for the sites to determine individually how they would respond to them.

The CBOs, despite considerable strengths, faced unanticipated challenges in the first year as they prepared to undertake the Initiative. Also, the Foundation recognized that additional time was needed for effective technical assistance to the planning activities. After reviewing draft RCI plans submitted by each of the sites, the Foundation concluded that more time was needed for each CBO to continue sharpening the focus of their plans and developing the collaborative governance structures they had established. Nine more months were added to the Planning Phase of the Initiative, allowing the sites until September 1995 to refine their strategies with continued technical assistance. Each site received an additional grant of \$200,000 to sustain the effort during this period.

RCI's Significance as a Comprehensive Community Initiative

RCI is one of a growing number of nationally significant initiatives that take a more holistic approach to revitalizing local communities. Within the domain of human services reform, there is widening recognition that "top-down" efforts to restructure public delivery systems have proved inadequate and incomplete in addressing the root causes of social problems, many of which originate in communities lacking in resources and supports for families. Within the domain of community development as well as in human services reform, there is a new understanding that efforts need to: (1) focus on "whole" neighborhoods; (2) empower residents as active participants in shaping solutions; and (3) establish new forms of collaboration within communities, and among communities and public/private service systems.

In this expanding arena of discussion and experimentation, RCI is a pivotal demonstration with significant opportunities to inform the wider field. While the level of AECF's financial commitment makes RCI the largest foundation-sponsored demonstration now underway, it is also significant because its combined neighborhood and systems change goals are more ambitious than in other community-building demonstrations. RCI's national significance is also the result of its substantial commitment to carefully documenting and evaluating the Initiative's impacts.

For these reasons, there are expectations in the field that RCI will offer useful insights into many of the critical issues that have emerged. In fact, the early RCI experiences

described in this Summary Assessment Report do shed light on critical issue areas that are central to how such efforts are organized and implemented. In later sections of this report, we offer some initial findings and lessons about the structure of such initiatives, the neighborhood planning processes and CBO capacity-building, and the ways that roles and relationships among the stakeholders are managed.

The Assessment Design

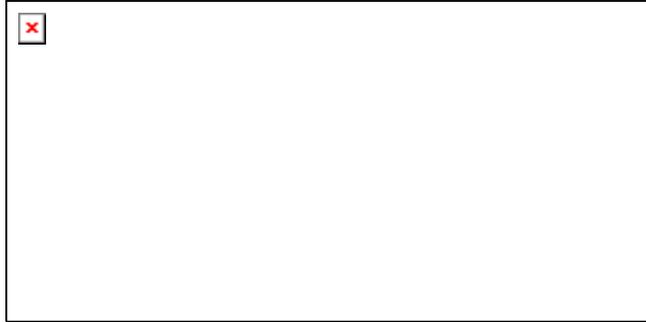
The RCI assessment was intended to serve a number of different purposes and thus included several discrete components. The assessment design aimed to strike a balance between *formative* assessment goals, such as providing regular feedback to the Foundation and the sites based on the evaluators' observations of progress made and issues that emerge from the assessment; and *outcome* assessment goals, which would enable scientific judgments to be made about the influences the Initiative had on the quality of the five neighborhood environments and, in time, on the individual families and children living in those neighborhoods.

Conceptual Model and Assumptions Guiding the Initiative

To help integrate these elements, and to better articulate the theory of change underlying this particular demonstration, the assessors developed a conceptual model of the Initiative, presented in [Figure 1](#), to illustrate the several distinct components making up the assessment.

At the left side of the diagram is the funder, *The Annie E. Casey Foundation*, which conceived the Initiative, is providing core funding, and will maintain an active leadership role throughout all the phases. Through monetary grants and the contributions of *technical assistance providers*, the Foundation is supporting planning, capacity-building, and collaboration involving stakeholders in each of the five neighborhoods. Among the stakeholders are residents and neighborhood-based organizations as well as organizations from beyond the neighborhood (government agencies, service providers, private businesses, and other funders). We refer to the organizational networks that emerge within each neighborhood as *systems of institutional collaboration*. Each of the neighborhoods will undertake projects within the *five critical areas* specified by the Foundation. The projects that are pursued will conform with *site-specific strategies* which may vary substantially from neighborhood to neighborhood.

The Initiative is expected to result in two kinds of outcomes—intermediate and ultimate outcomes. *Intermediate outcomes* include changes in the lead CBOs and the capacity of the neighborhood collaboratives, new or improved programs and services, improvements in the neighborhood physical and social environment, and other changes that will make the neighborhoods better places in which to live and to raise children. The Foundation expects that these intermediate outcomes will not only result in a better quality of life for residents, but also support improvements in *ultimate outcomes* - evidenced by changes in child and family well-being.



[View](#) a full-size version of Figure 1 (68K GIF)

The Assessment's Cross-Site and Site-Specific Components

As the conceptual model suggests, RCI is a single program governed by a unifying framework and a set of overarching goals. Yet all the specific projects to be implemented in each of the five sites are still being determined and can be expected to vary considerably. The evaluation plan is designed to balance the assessment of the Initiative as a whole with the assessment of the particular projects and experiences of the individual neighborhoods. It is also designed to provide a formative evaluation of the community-building strategies among the CBOs and their collaborators.

The evaluation includes five components: (1) documentation and assessment of AEFCF's role in designing and managing the Initiative; (2) documentation and assessment of the institutional changes that occur in each site, including the lead CBOs, the neighborhood governance structures, and local collaborations that develop; (3) documentation and assessment of the various strategies that emerge to achieve Rebuilding Communities goals in each of the five participating communities; (4) a cross-site outcomes assessment, relying on a neighborhood quality-of-life survey* and selective data-gathering from agency databases and other local field-work; and (5) site-specific, case study assessments which document the development of RCI and its influences within the neighborhood and on larger systems, and lay the foundation for measuring outcomes relevant to each site's strategies and programs.

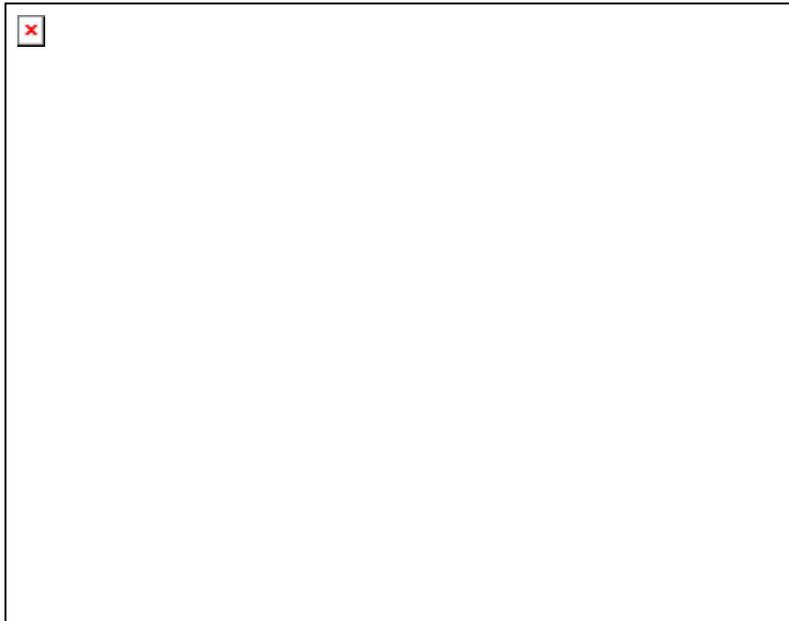
*The assessment's substantial investment in the neighborhood surveys, and its emphasis on tracking changes in each community using selected cross-site indicators, reflect AEFCF's commitment to determining how neighborhood conditions affecting the quality of life for residents actually improve during the Initiative. These dimensions of the assessment, including the cross-site indicators identified and the approach to gathering data relating to them, are fully described in a separate **Technical Assessment Report**, available from the Annie E. Casey Foundation or the OMG Center for Collaborative Learning.

2. The Five RCI Communities

Each of the five communities selected for RCI has a unique history and character, and the CBOs chosen to represent them in this Initiative are themselves quite diverse. Although differences among the participating communities have contributed to RCI's complexity, during the Planning Phase this diversity came to be seen as an asset. Variations in the types and scale of neighborhoods served, in each CBOs' community development approach and focus, and in their prior program expertise, presented opportunities for comparison and learning for AECF and the individual sites.

The Target Communities

The target communities are substantially different in size, racial/ethnic composition, levels of income and employment, and in their respective needs and assets. Perhaps the most significant differences among the five sites are in the geographic size of the designated target areas and their resident populations. Some of the neighborhoods' key characteristics are shown in Table 1 below.



[\(close up of table\)](#)

The Five Lead CBOs

Some specific factors associated with the lead organizations have proved to be

significant in how they have become engaged with and managed the Initiative during the Planning Phase. These factors include each CBO's particular origins and history, its scale of operation prior to RCI, and its particular program strengths. These are briefly reviewed here.

Origins and history. All five organizations were experienced CBOs with strong community roots, though their origins and histories made them significantly different from one another. Four of the five organizations were similar in age, with the youngest, DSNI, only eight years old, and the oldest, NEWSED, founded 20 years earlier. (The exception was Germantown Settlement, which had been established as a settlement house in the late 1800s.) Two of the organizations (NEWSED and Marshall Heights) were structured as typical community development corporations, and each had experience with physical revitalization and commercial development. Germantown formed a subsidiary community development corporation and became involved in physical development during the 1980s. WCDC in Detroit was a coalition of many community organizations serving Detroit's Eastside; it had been deeply involved in local political battles to bring improved services to Eastside residents and increase their voice in city government. Similarly, DSNI was organized to take on political struggles involved in controlling development of the neighborhood, and had the most experience with grass roots community organizing. The organizations had varying levels of experience with human services provision. With its settlement house tradition, GS clearly had the greatest experience, and although primarily involved in physical development, MHCDO had ventured more deeply into human services in recent years. The others had much more limited experience in managing or coordinating service delivery programs.

Organizational size. NEWSED and DSNI, with full-time staffs of six and nine respectively, were much smaller than the other lead organizations at the onset of RCI. These two CBOs were presented with significant challenges in adapting to the demands of the Initiative; each grew markedly and made significant changes in leadership and staffing structures over the course of the Planning Phase. The other three entered RCI as larger and more established organizations, for whom RCI was a significant undertaking, but not the only large-scale initiative underway. For Germantown Settlement in particular, RCI was one of several comprehensive and demanding employment and human services initiatives with which they were involved. Germantown's RCI experience, and to a lesser degree the experiences of the other larger CBOs, suggests that while being larger helps, it does not necessarily mean an organization is better equipped to anticipate or handle the demands of an initiative like RCI.

Recognized strengths prior to RCI. Of the five, Germantown Settlement began the Initiative with the broadest program experience. During the Planning Phase, the CBOs were all challenged to make sense of the Initiative in relation to their own prior experiences and most had to begin shoring up areas in which their expertise was more limited. For example, Marshall Heights and NEWSED entered the Initiative with extensive experience in physical revitalization and economic development, but much

more limited knowledge of community involvement strategies and human services delivery. Despite its strong background in resident empowerment and advocacy, DSNI had little direct program management experience. WCDC in Detroit had proved its capacity for political coalition-building and had recently expanded its physical revitalization activities, but its direct experience with human services delivery was limited mainly to youth leadership. The RCI strategies that were devised during the Planning Phase provided each CBO with an opportunity not only to build on proven strengths, but also to venture into new program areas, both on their own and in new collaborations.

Despite their considerable differences, each of the five CBOs found ways during the Planning Phase to use RCI resources to build on their prior strengths, while at the same time formulating collaborative strategies with other local partners which will lead them into areas that are substantially new and promise to stretch their current capacities. The diversity among the lead CBOs has led them to pursue very different approaches to planning and launching RCI in their communities.

Already it is evident that the significant differences that exist among the sites provide the Foundation with opportunities for thinking more broadly about the implementation of a comprehensive community revitalization approach. This diversity among the neighborhoods has required that AECF be attentive to the very different contexts in which the lead CBOs are attempting to fulfill the goals of the Initiative. Program staff, along with RCI technical assistance providers and evaluators, have had to continuously account for these differences in responding to site-specific needs and making judgments about progress and performance across the sites.

Dudley Street Neighborhood Initiative, Roxbury / North Dorchester, Boston

Established in 1984, the Dudley Street Neighborhood Initiative (DSNI) evolved out of a community initiated movement to address the effects of years of abandonment and disinvestment in the Roxbury/North Dorchester neighborhood of Boston, and to protect the neighborhood from outside speculation. DSNI employs a neighborhood revitalization approach that recognizes the physical, human, and economic development needs of the community. Central to this approach is a resident-driven philosophy through which DSNI attempts to bring about neighborhood change.

As a planning and community organizing group, DSNI has successfully coordinated several community-wide campaigns and planning initiatives. Prior to its involvement in the Rebuilding Communities Initiative, DSNI's accomplishments included: the development of a resident-driven plan which has been accepted as the City of Boston's official redevelopment plan for the area; successfully organizing to gain eminent domain authority over vacant land in a section of the neighborhood known as the Dudley Triangle; and ensuring that the community is involved in the decision-making and planning processes of organizations serving the neighborhood. DSNI's sister organization, Dudley Neighbors, Inc., is a land trust that holds ownership of land in the Dudley Triangle area.

Warren / Conner Development Coalition, Detroit

Warren/Conner Development Coalition evolved from a movement initiated by a small group of community leaders, residents and business people from the Eastside of Detroit interested in revitalizing their community. This coalition was incorporated as a non-profit community coalition in 1984. Today, WCDC plays several roles in the Eastside community-coalition-builder; advocate and organizer; identifier of resources; convener of forums for discussion, debate and planning; community educator; sponsor and coordinator of programs for youth; leadership development; and (through an affiliate organization) commercial development. Given the complex problems and issues faced by the Eastside, WCDC's philosophy is to increase the capacity of local leaders, and to develop solutions that address community problems holistically and have long-term potential for changing the political dynamics in Detroit's Eastside.

The organization's services are provided in four major program areas-employment and economic independence; economic development; youth leadership, training, counseling and academic support; and community education and organizing. Specific examples of programs coordinated by WCDC include: the Partnership for Economic Independence which assists chronically jobless families in the Eastside to achieve self-sufficiency; DETROIT East Community Development Corporation which is a for-profit real estate development corporation whose shareholders are Eastside residents; Youth on the Edge of Greatness, a comprehensive youth leadership development program; and Project Lead which provides several twelve-week training courses a year to neighborhood residents.

Germantown Settlement, Philadelphia

Founded in 1884, Germantown Settlement's (GS) long-standing mission emphasizes comprehensive neighborhood revitalization through community collaboration. The Settlement's development subsidiary, Greater Germantown Housing Development Corporation (GGHDC), provides housing and housing counseling, and implements commercial and economic development projects. The Wister Neighborhood Council, also associated with GS, is a resident organizing agency. GS and its sister organizations work in collaboration to pursue a two-pronged community revitalization strategy addressing both social and physical development needs. Their partnership has given birth to such recent efforts as Child Health Watch, a program providing information, advocacy, referrals and case management to low-income families without access to health insurance; Northwest Advisory Employment Committee, which seeks employers for area residents; creation of the Lower Germantown Business Association; the \$6 million Freedom Square complex of 47 units of elderly housing, 16 townhouses and 20,000 square feet of attractive, new retail space; and many other efforts in housing, commercial development, social services and allied areas.

GS has been engaged in several large-scale neighborhood improvement efforts in recent years-each moving it toward a more comprehensive approach to meeting neighborhood needs. It viewed its involvement in RCI's Planning Phase as an opportunity to better link these efforts, and now regards RCI as providing a framework which will enable the community to pursue a more integrated and holistic revitalization approach.

Marshall Heights Community Development Organization, Washington DC

Marshall Heights Community Development Organization (MHCDO) was organized in 1978 by a group of neighborhood residents of Ward Seven as a forum for citizens to express community concerns on housing and community development and improve interaction with the District government. Although MHCDO's primary accomplishments have been in the area of economic and commercial development, today it is a multifaceted community development corporation. Its accomplishments in physical revitalization include the development and management of East River Park, a 155,000 SF shopping center (the largest in Ward Seven); development of 135 units of rehab housing; and the construction of 12 units of for-sale housing. Its most prominent human services program, the Fighting Back Initiative, is a comprehensive alcohol and drug prevention, reduction and treatment program operating in wards Seven and Eight. MHCDO also operates employment, training and job development programs serving area residents.

Marshall Heights has distinguished itself in the District as a significant voice in the affairs of Ward Seven. Its large board, comprised mainly of residents, is active in governance and provides Marshall Heights with

a rich network of connections to other organizations representing the community.

NEWSED Community Development Corporation, Denver

NEWSED CDC's mission is to promote programs and projects that raise the income, educational and political levels of West Denver residents. NEWSED's revitalization strategy has aimed at solving longer-term economic problems in the community by creating or attracting new jobs, developing needed shopping areas and services, fostering minority business ownership, improving the neighborhood's physical infrastructure, providing employment and training services, and strengthening political advocacy and empowerment.

Since its founding in 1973, NEWSED has served as the catalyst for a variety of economic development activities that have resulted in the stabilization and expansion of commercial businesses along the Santa Fe Drive corridor. NEWSED's past projects and programs have included: the co-development of two local shopping centers; a large UDAG-funded housing/commercial project; establishment of a merchants' association which has undertaken streetscape improvements and provided technical assistance to businesses along Santa Fe Drive; and development of some 83 new small businesses. NEWSED also offers employment placement and vocational skills training, and promotes cultural diversity through the production of Denver's annual Cinco de Mayo celebration, and other events that acknowledge the contributions of Mexican Americans and others to Denver's multicultural community. Today, NEWSED is the largest and most stable community-based organization in West Denver.

RCI Planning Phase: Summary Assessment Report

3. Progress During the Planning Phase

In an effort to document the progress made toward the Planning Phase goals, the assessment focused on three primary tasks: 1) helping the CBOs to position themselves to undertake the Initiative; 2) beginning to engage residents and other stakeholders in each community; and 3) formulating community plans capable of guiding the development of RCI in subsequent phases.

Positioning the CBOs to Undertake the Initiative

Despite the considerable strengths that each CBO brought to the Initiative, each confronted critical organizational development challenges to enable it to effectively undertake the ambitious RCI effort. The task of "positioning" the CBOs required them to stretch beyond their established competencies and, often, to begin a process of internal structural change, including several complex elements:

- Each CBO worked to assure that it had a strong internal grasp of the Initiative

and of the ways in which other organizational activities would relate to it and reinforce it.

- Each CBO had to establish a strong leadership team for the Initiative by: determining the project management skills required for a Project Manager; hiring the right person; and then discerning how the considerable responsibilities of the new role would differ from those of the Executive Director, who would also play a major leadership role in RCI.
- Each CBO's process skills were stretched in new ways, since the RCI model required that the organizations act as facilitators, planners and conveners. For three of the five, this was a new role; two had to expand in this area.
- The CBOs also had to begin to address organizational development and management issues, since each grew as a result of the new RCI staff and the RCI revenue. In many cases, this growth was dramatic; in others, RCI growth came on the heels of other similar recent growth.
- Each of the CBOs had to expand their expertise in several technical and substantive areas. In most areas, the CBOs had prior expertise, but most have had to bring new or expanded organizational competency to improve human service systems for children and youth. In addition, RCI also challenged each of the sites to use data effectively to create their plan.

All of the CBOs made marked progress in creating a broad level of understanding of the Initiative's goals and approach among their boards and staff. The Foundation provided opportunities for broad local participation by convening RCI conferences, and through frequent contact that AECF staff maintained with the sites. But the CBOs' deepening understanding was also the cumulative result of the CBOs' direct involvement with the tasks of planning.

The degree of progress made by each CBO in positioning itself for RCI was closely associated with its success in establishing a leadership team that effectively combined the roles and talents of the RCI Project Manager and Executive Director. The complex set of skills required to perform the RCI Project Manager role and the essential participation of the Executive Director were increasingly evident as the Initiative got underway, and different arrangements of these roles appeared among the CBOs.

The scale and comprehensiveness of RCI presented all the CBOs with other difficult organizational challenges. The CBOs' varying needs for organizational restructuring and development were recognized early by the Foundation, and each site was encouraged and supported as they began addressing these concerns.

The Planning Phase of the Initiative also required that the CBOs become more adept as conveners and facilitators. Overall, those CBOs who began RCI with more experience in organizing and coalition-building found it easier to move into this new

role and were more skillful in leading their community-based planning process. As planning progressed, all the CBOs' skills increased and the sites began learning from one another's experiences. However, this change in the CBOs' roles is still underway and it would be premature to claim that any site fully appreciates all the implications of the shift toward its new neighborhood intermediary role.

The CBOs brought to RCI varying expertise in organizing, housing, economic development, and other areas. However, to implement their plans they will need to deepen their technical knowledge of best practices in human services reform, and in how to manage the new programs now being considered. Further, while the Planning Phase broadened the CBOs' appreciation of the use of data for planning and management, it also revealed that more support will be needed to deepen their technical information management skills.

Finally, although all the lead CBOs managed to establish new community governance structures with broad representation, they had varying degrees of success in differentiating these new structures' roles and responsibilities from those of their own boards.

Engaging the Local Communities

One of the Foundation's key assumptions shaping RCI is that each neighborhood's vision of the future is best created by those who have the biggest stake in it—community residents, and representatives from other important local organizations, agencies and businesses. Such a bottom-up plan is more likely to represent real needs and interests and therefore has a better chance of being implemented. Further, the Foundation's approach sought to empower people through participation in the planning processes, and then through involvement in local governance structures which would continue to monitor and guide plan implementation. Such participation would in time create the new leadership and local power needed to continue championing community interests.

Two other assumptions are embedded in RCI's commitment to community engagement. First, a healthy community needs many robust organizations. Second, to effect any systems change and capture additional resources, city, state and federal government agencies must join in the local RCI effort. Thus, during the Planning Phase each RCI community was expected to engage other capable CBOs to help them plan and eventually implement RCI, and to involve relevant government agencies in planning how public resources and systems should be part of the process.

The second of the CBOs' key tasks of the Planning Phase was to engage a broad range of community residents, along with representatives from other relevant community-based organizations, businesses, and government agencies to create a vision for their community. In addition, the CBOs focused on creating new neighborhood governance structures comprised of a broad representation of community stakeholders who would oversee the RCI process. Once these new structures understood the Initiative, the task shifted to defining their role in guiding the Initiative and helping them build the skills

necessary to assume it.

Each of the RCI sites experimented with different community involvement tools and activities. Each reported renewed engagement with their community. The most critical issues for the governance councils, however, centered on how to work through past frictions and manage the inevitable tensions over how new resources would be distributed. During the Planning Phase, the newly established councils were largely successful in moving beyond past differences. They made less progress toward resolving the complex partner selection and accountability questions. Many of these remain to be addressed as the councils seek to play stronger coordinating roles in their neighborhoods.

Each of the five CBOs had to determine for itself how best to reach out into its local community and engage residents and other prospective collaborators. One part of the task was establishing a governance structure that would provide local oversight for the Initiative. Another was engaging residents in the concepts and potential impacts of the Initiative, and drawing them into the planning process. A third was identifying partners and collaborators who would work closely with the lead organizations in planning and eventually implementing activities included in the Initiative. A final task was the identification of opportunities for improving the public systems that address the human service needs of families and children.

Those CBOs with prior organizing and coalition-building experience initially found it easier to engage a broad group of community stakeholders in the RCI planning process. Though the others got slower starts, all of the CBOs made use of a variety of approaches and techniques in securing the broad community input needed. The process also helped to ready the community for change by identifying and engaging new and existing leaders whose energies are needed to assist with implementation plan elements.

Because planning required prioritization of needs and goals, conflicting demands were placed on the CBOs and governance structures to make narrowing decisions—while at the same time being inclusive enough of diverse interests to keep all key stakeholders at the table. In the end, all the sites recognized that some conflict was inevitable in community goal-setting, and all five sites were able to balance competing interests and achieve reasonable consensus on RCI goals and priorities.

Formulating Community Plans

The creation of the Rebuilding Communities Plans was perhaps the most difficult of the Initiative's tasks and included several distinct activities. These involved: 1) forging a more inclusive vision among community stakeholders, 2) setting priorities that would focus the plan and define how resources would be used, 3) translating the broad goals into practical work plans, and 4) defining roles for the other collaborators as the goals of the plans became clearer. Finally, with assistance from the assessment team, the planning process identified meaningful site-specific indicators that could be

used in determining progress in later phases of RCI.

The five CBOs' plans are presented individually throughout the next several pages to capture for the reader key elements of each community's vision and the challenges they face in realizing their goals.

The Foundation's guidelines for the RCI community plans reflected its interest in striking a balance between prescription and responsiveness to site-specific approaches and concerns. At the beginning of the Planning Phase, each site was instructed to address the five broad areas of the Initiative described in Section One—maximizing the capacity of residents and neighborhood institutions, developing neighborhood-based human service systems for children and youth, reforming economic development streams of resources, housing and infrastructure, and creating alternate capital investment. But each site was encouraged to respond with community-appropriate and community-determined objectives, and to incorporate strategies based upon local opportunities and the community's strengths. Therefore, each plan would reflect different emphases and interpretations in different areas. Later, as part of its decision to extend the Planning Phase, AECF added the requirement that each plan should include a services component for children and youth. As part of the plan guidelines, the Foundation indicated that each plan should be accompanied by a three-year budget for the Capacity-Building Phase, during which each site was expected to receive up to \$500,000 annually.

Warren/Conner Development Coalition, Eastside Detroit

While the Warren/Conner plan is ambitious and calls for the implementation of several new programs, underlying all elements of the plan is a consistent approach to change:

- **Neighborhood development.** This involves the creation of a new community center; the development of a neighborhood toolbox that will strengthen local neighborhood organizations through information-based organizing and technical assistance; strengthening the capacity of residents for taking on an education reform agenda through increasing access to and abilities to analyze education information and data; and the conduct of a vacant land reclamation and land use reform project.
 - **Governance reform.** This goal will include three interrelated strategies: (1) to work with local government to increase neighborhood control of many city services and policies; (2) developing a political education and organizing entity for the Eastside; and (3) planning for a community driven process to significantly revise the city's Master Plan and create an ongoing structure for resident control of this planning.
 - **Economic vitality.** This aspect includes developing an Eastside real estate intermediary; better opportunities for workforce development such as school-based incubators, school-to-work programs, employer-driven training curricula, and trainer-placement network development; and retaining existing businesses by the development of small business assistance networks, and access to capital and business development opportunities.
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comprehensive direction for improving its physical, social and economic life.

Because of the ambitious scope of the community plans, the Foundation assumed that each CBO would need to broaden its organizational and program capacities, and that additional organizational partners would be required. Thus, each site was expected to identify in their plan specific areas in which there was a need to strengthen the CBO's capacity. In addition, the plans were expected to identify the other institutional partners who would be collaborating with the lead CBOs during Capacity-Building, and to identify these organizations' capacity-building needs.

The community plans that were formulated provide an indication of the comprehensive vision and direction that was created during the RCI Planning Phase. Although they vary significantly, some common themes emerge. Similarly, each site confronted common issues as they attempted to align many, often competing, goals and to establish priorities the community could live with and that would enable the plans to guide action in RCI's subsequent phases.

The five RCI community plans encompass a broad range of revitalization strategies that address an even broader array of community-identified needs and interests. Further, each plan builds on each CBO's and community's strengths. While the five community plans that emerged are distinctive, all achieved a high level of comprehensiveness in their visions and all responded to AECF's guidelines.

The Lower Germantown Community Plan

Reflecting the needs of the Lower Germantown community and the expertise of Germantown Settlement in forming public-private partnerships, the plan has three primary elements:

- **Organizational and neighborhood capacity-building:** to enhance the technical and institutional skills of individuals and local service delivery systems to respond effectively and economically to the needs and interests of members of the target area; to strengthen Wister Neighborhood Council (GS's organizing affiliate organization) and identify and develop a partnership with one neighborhood-based organization in each of the three communities to provide organizational support.
- **Community organizing:** to increase the ability and opportunity of residents to plan, act and influence public and private decision-making for services to children, youth and families in the target area through: 1) the establishment of a community leadership institute, 2) the establishment of a culturally sensitive and community responsive communications system, and 3) the development of an integrated agency-wide MIS; and build local capacity to implement a neighborhood development plan.
- **Public/private systems reform for improvement for children, youth and families:** to develop a policy framework and related organizational vehicle for the long-term implementation of a seamless and integrated system of public and private reform in healthcare, education, social development/welfare and physical development; improve public school attendance and academic performance of children within the target area; stabilize at-risk families; and create a community-wide, neighborhood-driven economic reinvestment strategy and plan.

The task of involving the community in creating a comprehensive plan required significant skill on the part of each CBO to guide the process, to keep it focused yet

inclusive. None of the CBOs had undertaken community planning on this scale before. Many factors made this task complex. First, residents and representatives of local organizations were asked to dream boldly about their community's future. While this was an appropriate way to engage their interest and assure quality input, it had some unintended results. Participants responded with such a vast array of basic community needs that the RCI planning process had to contend with daunting lists of priorities which were profound evidence of the years of neglect that had weakened their communities.

Second, each of the CBOs recognized the necessity to keep the many different interests at the table. Not surprisingly, in accommodating different views, some of the sites also had to contend with narrower, often political, motivations on the part of some stakeholders. In Denver, for example, a subgroup of local residents uncomfortable with NEWSED's designation as the lead organization was not always constructive and tended to alienate other stakeholders. There and in other communities, the planning process provided an opportunity for older, local power struggles for control of the agenda to be revisited.

Plan for La Alma / Lincoln Park, Denver

The plan for La Alma/Lincoln Park involves all providers in the area in a comprehensive and decentralized human service delivery system, a new area for NEWSED:

- **Comprehensive and decentralized human service delivery systems for children, youth and families** will be established based on the Prevention, Intervention, Treatment and Aftercare (PITA) philosophy, and include: a satellite office for social services within the neighborhood, expanding local mental health services, using recreational activities as an intervention strategy, possibly establishing a senior center, and exploring co-location of community services.
- **Comprehensive programs for self-sufficiency** will build on NEWSED's strength in economic development, and include four distinct types of activity: housing, economic development, employment and training. Activities may include the production of 10-15 units of housing per year (including both ownership and affordable rental); developing a small-business incubator in NEWSED's existing facility; exploring micro-enterprise development and expanding support for small businesses; and working with the Mayor's Office of Employment and Training to fund a youth employment and training program.
- **Promoting culture and the arts within the neighborhood and establishing a cultural arts district** by building off of NEWSED's historical role in the Cinco de Mayo Celebration and the emerging concentration of arts organizations located on Santa Fe Drive, seen as potential economic resources.
- **Enhancing the PODER Advisory Council** by making a commitment to gradually increase its responsibilities, and to build the skills of this community governance body to guide plan implementation.
- **Community involvement and empowerment** by addressing longer term reforms, with an emphasis on educational reform. As now defined, this focuses on broader-level advocacy and leadership development. There is interest in greater use of schools as community resources and in reform of the public school system.
- **Developing an integrated MIS between PODER collaborators** to collect cross-agency client data required for better service delivery and for program planning and evaluation.

The necessity to include the Foundation's mission to make changes in systems affecting children and youth further complicated the process. Clearly, the Foundation misjudged the sites' abilities to fully address this element and to incorporate innovative approaches into their plans. Although addressing service needs for children

and youth was posed as essential from the beginning, the sites' lack of experience in this area made it difficult for them to develop strategies with any depth. As noted earlier, the sites also felt the Foundation had not been explicit enough about its expectations that the plans include new approaches to public services reform. Surprisingly, even though several of the sites were already engaged in innovative systems reform efforts, this dimension proved especially difficult to incorporate into the plans.

The great breadth and limited strategic focus still evident in the final versions of the community plans can be viewed as an inevitable result of their successful inclusion of many local stakeholders with different priorities. Throughout this process, the CBOs struggled with the various, occasionally healthy, tensions created by balancing inclusiveness with strategic focus. Ultimately, the CBOs' own skills coupled with various external supports enabled them to manage these tensions and produce plans that had considerably more focus than earlier visions. While all of the sites' plans would have benefitted from additional refinement and still more strategic focus, each plan was sharpened and enriched over the nine months of the Extended Planning Phase.

DSNI's Plan for the Roxbury / Dorchester Neighborhood in Boston

DSNI's community plan grows from its commitment to a ³resident-power philosophy,² and from a physical plan for the neighborhood that was completed in 1987. The RCI plan is more comprehensive, however, emphasizing human services and children and youth in addition to its established focus on resident services, and has four key elements:

- **Continuing to build the capacity of residents to play a greater leadership role in the community** through creating a resident development institute, strengthening the network of resident activist leaders, and creating a process for plan standard-setting and monitoring by residents.
- **Guiding the comprehensive physical development of the Dudley Triangle area** by building an inventory on land use and conditions; establishing an overall community strategy for land use; working collaboratively to ensure community input for housing plans; conducting a survey of neighborhood housing conditions to guide future housing development; determining key environmental issues to focus on; maximizing job and business opportunities generated by development efforts for residents and minorities; and conducting an inclusive planning process for community centers.
- **Creating the most nurturing community possible for children and youth** by convening a group to plan, develop and carry out a campaign for them; strengthening the Nubian Roots Youth Committee (a youth leadership program); and piloting a Saturday School program by Nubian Roots.
- **Building DSNI's network of partner organizations and collaboratives** necessary to carry out the community plan, and strengthening the DSNI board's ability to govern as a collaboration of residents, agencies, religious organizations, and businesses.

Translating Goals to Action Priorities and Workplans

Although the five sites successfully articulated appropriate broad goals for the local RCI programs, they all had greater difficulty during the initial planning year formulating the priorities, strategies and workplans that would be needed to achieve those goals. By year end, only one site had produced a plan that included a manageable number of priorities linked with specific project ideas. The other sites' plans were still

rather broad, and had not completely matched proposed programs and project activities to available local resources and capacities.

At the end of the first year, the Foundation and the assessors concurred that without better defined strategies for achieving their goals, the plans would not provide the kind of program guidance needed and could foster unrealistic expectations in the community. The review of the initial plans led AECF to suggest that the CBOs needed not only to further refine the plans and develop more detailed strategies, but also to continue engaging the broader community and strengthening the newly established governance structures.

By the end of the Extended Planning Phase nine months later, the sites had better defined and focused their community plans. But the plans still fell short in clearly linking identified strategies with work plans, timelines and budgets. Completing this step in the planning process would inevitably force additional prioritizing and sharpening of strategies, and provide some valuable additional direction in getting started. Recognizing this, AECF made the task of developing more specific workplans and budgets for the next year the sites' first requirement of the Capacity-Building Phase.

Despite the strengths that the five lead CBOs brought to the planning process, the complexity of this task was underestimated. As indicated earlier, the original time frame of one year proved to be too short for the CBOs to produce RCI plans that create an inspiring vision, keep all key stakeholders at the table, identify community needs within a truly bottom-up process, and address the Foundation's own priorities. The extra time provided by AECF's extension of the Planning Phase was ultimately needed and used well. In retrospect, the sites could have benefitted from more assistance early in managing the community-based strategic planning process.

Finally, the RCI plans were originally expected to have identified other partners who would work closely with the lead CBOs during the Capacity-Building and Implementation Phases. For the most part, the plans fell short of this expectation. The generally fragile condition of other community-based organizations, combined with the CBOs' often justified ambivalence about being an intermediary, and the still embryonic decision-making capacities of the governance councils, made selecting partners difficult during the Planning Phase.

Marshall Heights Plan Features

MHCDO's plan reflects the identification of many gaps in community services, amenities and needs in Ward 7 by a broad group of participants. Because MHCDO is clearly the most qualified and respected organization in the Ward, it may be expected to implement all these ideas, though that may not be possible or even desirable. Thus, the list of overall capacity-building goals emphasizes the importance of strengthening other community capacities.

- **Improving education by:** empowering the full community to work together for educational improvement in Ward 7; creating infrastructure and relationships to support and demand excellence in educational opportunities and lifelong learning in Ward 7; and developing a comprehensive multi-service center which includes a University of DC satellite campus.

- **Increasing opportunities for health care by:** creating a managed health care system that provides clinical care as the core service and includes support services and community outreach.
- **Increasing community wellness by:** creating an environment that supports and encourages positive lifestyles for children and families.
- **Improving housing options by:** hosting a planning conference; and acquiring a continued commitment for technical and professional assistance.
- **Increasing jobs and training opportunities by:** providing job training and employment for the hard-core and long-term unemployed residents of Ward 7; and providing proper job placement services to assist in employment sustainability.
- **Achieving systems reform by:** expanding the capacity of MHCDO and the RCI Steering Committee to provide information and legislative support to other working groups; and developing a program for expanding communication nodes throughout the MHCDO area while also expanding business opportunities.

In addition, the plan calls for several broad, overall capacity-building goals: establishing a partnership with the DC Public Housing Authority, resident council presidents and MHCDO; improving the working relationship between Ward 7 public housing resident councils and MHCDO; increasing leadership capacity of the RCI Steering Committee; building the organizational capacity of other neighborhood-based organizations; increasing MHCDO's internal capacity; and instituting a state-of-the-art volunteer resource bank of residents' skills and talents.

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4. Broader Lessons and Implications

The findings from the RCI Planning Phase assessment suggest some broader lessons of potential relevance to other comprehensive community initiatives. In addition, they provide support for several specific recommendations that may be helpful to AECF and the sites in subsequent RCI phases.

Lessons About the Design and Structuring of Comprehensive Initiatives

Both CBOs and funders should anticipate and plan for the difficulties in creating a broad community vision for the Initiative and getting a cross-section of the community involved. Though the sites ultimately accomplished this goal, this did not come easily. Despite their exemplary track records and experiences with project and neighborhood planning, none proved to have the depth of expertise required to launch and sustain such a challenging planning effort. Even with additional time and technical assistance for planning, several of the sites continued to struggle with narrowing and choosing among alternatives, determining how future community decisions would be made, or establishing more specific program schedules and budgets. Although various types of technical assistance were made available, all would have benefitted from earlier training in facilitating community strategic planning.

Because CCI's are so demanding for the lead CBOs, their organizational

infrastructures, prior experiences, and current commitments need to be carefully assessed at the point of selection to ensure there is a good match. While AECF's criteria for site selection were sensible and balanced, the Planning Phase experience suggests that more consideration needs to be given to the impacts of such a demanding initiative on smaller CBOs as well as larger CBOs with other major initiatives underway. For a smaller organization, the challenges of participating in RCI's many activities can at times be overwhelming. In larger organizations with other major initiatives underway, RCI suffered at times from competition for the time and attention of the organization's leadership and from the community.

If a primary aim of a CCI demonstration is to test whether a strategy of resource concentration and coordination has measurable impacts on neighborhood quality of life, then careful attention must be given to the scale of the neighborhood targeted. Although it is somewhat early to make a final judgment, it appears that some of the targeted neighborhoods are simply too large for the resources brought together within RCI to have dramatic and measurable impacts within them. Even when the potential for leveraging additional resources is significant, as is the case in several of the RCI communities, the size of the target population, the geographical expanse of the neighborhood, and the diversity of interests and needs included, need also to be considered. Thus, during planning, neighborhood scale must be carefully appraised to balance trade-offs between the demonstration goals of a CCI and the practical social, political and economic issues the CBOs must address in working with local collaborators.

While funders of CCIs should avoid being overly prescriptive and allow the initiative to respond to specific sites' needs and approaches, too little definition and direction can also undermine the partnership-building process. In the case of RCI, the Foundation was especially concerned that it not impose its own vision of comprehensive community-building on its local partners, believing that the strength of the partnerships it sought to establish with the sites depended on their being given plenty of room to define what RCI should be in their communities. But in its efforts to avoid prescription, the Foundation sometimes created uncertainty about its own intentions, something with which the local sites had difficulty. As the Planning Phase proceeded, AECF found the sites welcomed its efforts to state its goals and expectations more explicitly.

Lessons about CBO Capacity and Leadership

CCI funders and CBOs should fully anticipate that the lead CBOs will begin undergoing profound organizational changes from early in the Initiative. The introduction of new staff, the Foundation, technical assistants and evaluators, intensive contact with other participating CBOs, increased involvement with other local partners in community planning, and increases in core funding, all begin to have complex, and immediate, effects on the participating CBOs. The experience of RCI suggests that funders should be prepared to respond early, supporting the CBOs well

with organizational development assistance.

The CBOs involved should expect that a CCI will require a substantial commitment of the Executive Director's time along with strong, full-time support from a skilled Project Manager. Within RCI, the sites' progress during the Planning Phase was largely the result of the active direct involvement of the Executive Directors. The CBOs that progressed more rapidly had, in addition, strong skilled support from an RCI Project Manager. These are minimum staffing requirements that need to be acknowledged early by each site and the funder.

Taking on a broader neighborhood intermediary role will not happen quickly or easily for any CBO, but some types of CBOs may find the shift easier to make than others. Those CBOs whose history and prior experiences have included acting as conveners, organizers and coalition-builders in their communities may already possess many of the capabilities and standing to move into broader intermediary roles. Within RCI, two of the five CBOs had these capabilities and were better positioned from the start to knit together diverse neighborhood interests. The other three remaining CBOs were more typical CDCs, with histories mainly as entrepreneurial physical developers or project-based social service agencies in their neighborhoods, and with limited in-house capacity at the start of RCI to play an intermediary role effectively. In addition, because of their project successes and established programs, they were sometimes viewed as competitors locally.

Lessons about Neighborhood Planning and Visioning

Funders and CBOs need to jointly establish expectations early about the level of community engagement that is desired and feasible. The Foundation's expectations for local resident and other stakeholder involvement in RCI were high. Although the CBOs agree with the funder about the value of broad involvement, they began the Initiative with different understandings, grounded in their past experiences, of what would constitute broad involvement. They also had varying ideas about how best to expand upon current levels of participation. Getting agreement about how much participation was enough took some time-the CBOs were initially cautious in their approaches and the Foundation was not always clear about its own expectations.

Conflict should be viewed as inevitable within a broad-based community planning effort-and not all conflicts need to be resolved in order for the process to move forward. Different interests and jockeying for position should be expected given the needs of these communities and the persistent scarcity of local resources. The CBO must balance the need to move the project along with their own legitimate needs to maintain their positions in the community. Even though this can place the lead CBO in a difficult situation, a long-term perspective must be kept and momentum must be maintained so as to keep critical players at the table even when some players may still be missing. Funders can be most helpful in this process by being clear about their own expectations and then learning to trust their local partners

to make sound judgments based on their knowledge of local situations.

Lessons about Neighborhood Governance

Unless local governance councils are allowed to make real decisions, participation in a CCI will wither; but the right conditions need to be established for these new structures to assume greater authority and ownership. Each of the CBOs and governance councils faces new challenges in clarifying their respective roles in local decision-making. Across the sites, the risk remains that the newly established councils will not assume enough responsibility and influence soon enough to gain real influence over the Initiative. Transferring real decision-making authority to these new structures is a critical challenge for the Capacity-Building Phase.

Just as the CBOs' need to strengthen their skills in building consensus and shared decision-making, so also do the governance councils-these skills are indispensable if the neighborhood governance councils are to develop their roles and credibility. Bringing diverse interests together to work as a group is always difficult, but especially so in community settings where past differences and competition for resources may hinder cooperation. The responsibility of newly established governance structures to bridge differences, establish trust, and arrive at supportable decisions, is not easily assumed. Funders and CBO leaders should be prepared to provide skilled technical support to governance councils early on to develop the skills required to work as an effective team.

The lead CBOs play critical but conflict-laden roles in forming and supporting newly established governance councils. The lead CBOs in RCI have worked in different ways with their respective governance structures to create a broad vision for their communities and to begin establishing their operating structures and make decisions. Ongoing support of these bodies will likely present new challenges for the CBOs who must juggle their new roles as the governance councils' facilitators and coaches with their own organizational interests. As the governance councils become stronger and assume greater authority, they will inevitably question and "test" the boundaries defining their own and the CBOs' authority and influence.

Lessons about the Funder's Role

Funders and CBOs establish effective partnerships only when they openly acknowledge mutual respect, their different stakes in an initiative and their real expectations of one another. Difficult though this process was at times for both AECF and the CBOs, the Planning Phase demonstrated that a "partnership" can be established in an unequal situation in which one partner is the funder. As in most relationships, this partnership was not automatic but was established after considerable testing, honest leveling and negotiation among the grantees and the Foundation. The central lessons of the Planning Phase are that partnership is indeed possible and that it will continue to deepen only when it is actively worked on and not

taken for granted by any of the parties.

Funders of CCIs need to appreciate and enthusiastically support CBOs' needs for continuous, high quality, and responsive organizational capacity-building; without it, a CCI's lead organization and its local partners stand little chance of succeeding. CCIs present enormous organizational challenges to community-based organizations that have rarely had the luxury to focus on organizational issues. As was the case with RCI, it may not be clear what is exactly needed by each CBO upon commencement. However, as AECF demonstrated, making a commitment to address CBOs' capacity-building needs from the initiative's inception, and then supporting it with high quality staffing and external technical assistance, is critical in preparing the CBO to engage with and sustain the effort.

The scale of CBO funding during planning needs to be sufficient to guarantee that qualified and committed core staff are consistently available to advance the goals of the initiative. The RCI experience reveals that flexible core funding on the order of \$160,000-200,000 over the nearly two years was adequate to hold the attention of even the largest of the five organizations. It helped guarantee that core staff were available, and provided resources for convening meetings, events, travel, and some overhead. Although some of the sites might have remained committed to the Initiative with a lower funding commitment, it is likely that other financial pressures facing each organization would have diminished their ability to devote the time needed for so demanding an effort.

There will always be a tension between the goal of channeling money through the lead CBO to other community-based organizations and the CBO's own practical need to use available resources to stabilize and strengthen its own operations. Until more funders are prepared to provide more flexible core funding to CBOs, and until more CBOs are able to achieve a higher level of financial independence, the goal of distributing funds through a CBO to other collaborators will always be exceeded by the CBOs' urgent need to use resources like those provided by RCI to fund their internal needs.

Lessons about Evaluation

Funders should maintain a balance between the formative and impact contributions that an evaluation can make over the course of the initiative. As RCI and other CCIs are proving, adequately identifying and measuring meaningful outcomes are difficult and resource-intensive parts of the evaluation. However, as funders and evaluators seek to find appropriate methods to evaluate change in communities engaged in CCIs, it is important to maintain a balance between the formative and impact elements of the evaluation during the course of the initiative. Having regular and independent feedback on the progress being made across sites, the roles and relationships that develop within the initiative, and the key issues that require attention, are critical formative benefits that an independent assessment team can provide. Given the complexity of CCIs and the field's early understanding of

them, formative evaluation is particularly important.

Since evaluators of CCIs must assess change at multiple levels within an initiative and within different communities, they must be effective at establishing and managing the relationships needed to access "honest" data while staying independent enough to add perspective and contribute to new knowledge. The RCI assessment design was complex and the overall methodology was not easily grasped, sometimes creating difficulties for all participants in understanding the assessment team's distinct role within RCI. Nonetheless, all the parties involved supported the assessment and enabled the assessors to establish the working relationships they needed to document the process and gather critical baseline data. But the challenges of the demonstration itself created occasions in which it became easy for the assessors to become overly-engaged in particular site issues or with the management concerns of AECF program staff. The lesson from this is that as a CCI assessment progresses, it is necessary for the assessment team members to periodically and purposefully step back from the activities of the Initiative to reestablish perspective and ensure that they retain a more independent stance.

Implications for the Next Phases of RCI

In conversations with AECF and the five sites, and in interim reports, the assessors have had numerous opportunities to share not only their observations and but also their concerns and suggestions about the Initiative. This has been particularly true as AECF and the sites have made the transition from the Planning Phase to the current Capacity-Building Phase. In the spirit of sharing learning from RCI with others interested in CCI, some of these specific suggestions bearing on the future course of the Initiative are presented here. In summary these include:

1. **Concentrate on a few specific initiatives in each site.** The lead CBOs and RCI's program staff should begin to concentrate in each community on a few specific initiatives that appear to be feasible and that build greater visibility and credibility for the larger strategy.
2. **Use AECF's influence to help strengthen local support for selected local initiatives strategically.** AECF should make more use of its substantial influence and resources to further engage local government leaders and other local funders, so that RCI's neighborhood-specific strategies are more closely linked with broader system reforms.
3. **Focus more technical resources on promising system reform initiatives.** AECF should sharpen plans for providing substantially more technical research and development resources to support some of the more significant system reform initiatives being considered in each target community.
4. **Continue to strengthen CBOs' convening and facilitating skills.** AECF should develop a plan for providing more support to the five lead organizations to build their own facilitation skills, and those of their governance councils.
5. **Rely more on performance-based workplans.** RCI staff should consider

developing performance-based work plans with each lead CBO or key collaborator to provide a more explicit framework for refining plans and strengthening organizational collaborative capacity.

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Acknowledgments

Since the OMG Center was engaged by the Annie E. Casey Foundation in 1994 as evaluators of the Rebuilding Communities Initiative, OMG staff have had the opportunity to work closely with each of the five Rebuilding Communities sites and the Foundation program staff on its numerous components.

The assessment has required much time and direct involvement on the part of CBO staff, and we recognize that the evaluation activities often placed additional demands on already full agendas. We would like to acknowledge each of the CBOs and their staff, many of whom are not named here, for their invaluable help during the assessment of this first phase of the Initiative. Our thanks to:

- Greg Watson, May Louie, and Gertrudes Fidalgo at *Dudley Street Neighborhood Initiative* in Boston;
- Emanuel Freeman, Connie Swinson, and Wanda Mial at *Germantown Settlement* in Philadelphia;
- Lloyd Smith, Patricia Press, and Angela Copeland at *Marshall Heights Community Development Organization* in Washington DC;
- Veronica Barela, Ramon Del Castillo, and LeRoy Lemos at *NEWSSED* in Denver; and
- Maggie DeSantis, Donna Johnson, and Lisa Toliva at *Warren/Conner Development Coalition* in Detroit.

OMG staff also wish to express their gratitude to the Annie E. Casey Foundation staff for their guidance and their high level of interest in the role of the evaluation within the Initiative. We thank Sandy Jibrell, Irene Lee, Miriam Shark, Alease Shuford, Sherece West, Garland Yates and Cindy Guy for their enthusiasm, advice, and helpful criticism as the evaluation has proceeded. Our particular thanks go to Manuel Gutierrez for his skillful management of the complex relationships among the many

stakeholders involved.

Finally, we acknowledge the support of Richard Pargament, Kim Huff and Fran Schorr in the difficult task of guiding the execution of the community surveys, and the perceptive comments of the other TA providers which have helped to make our job easier and more enjoyable.

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