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The *Paths* to Leadership in **Community Change**

A Review of Leadership Development Models
in the Rebuilding Communities Initiative

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Preface

Grassroots leaders have been stepping into the fray on behalf of their communities for generations. Some observers — including leadership expert John Gardner, national columnist Neal Pierce, and leaders of the National Civic League — maintain that civic organizations are the prime generators of new leadership in American democracy. But these organizations don't generate leaders spontaneously: the leadership development process must be nurtured over time.

It is surprising that the success of community organizations in generating leaders is little documented and scarcely studied. A bibliography of works on the topic in the last 10 years includes only about a dozen scholarly studies and half as many books. These works mostly record the stories of charismatic local leaders and advocate the importance of community groups. (A good compilation of sources may be found in Jacquelyn Mondros' 1994 book, *Organizing for Power and Empowerment*, part of the Columbia University Press series on empowerment.)

Empowerment may be in, but there has been scant scholarly analysis and evaluation of leadership development approaches by community-based organizations. Worse yet, practitioners do not share a common vocabulary for explaining their approaches and comparing their efficacy.

The five community-based organizations that are helping lead the Annie E. Casey Foundation's Rebuilding Communities Initiative (RCI) offer excellent opportunities to document the success of community-based leadership development. The groups are:

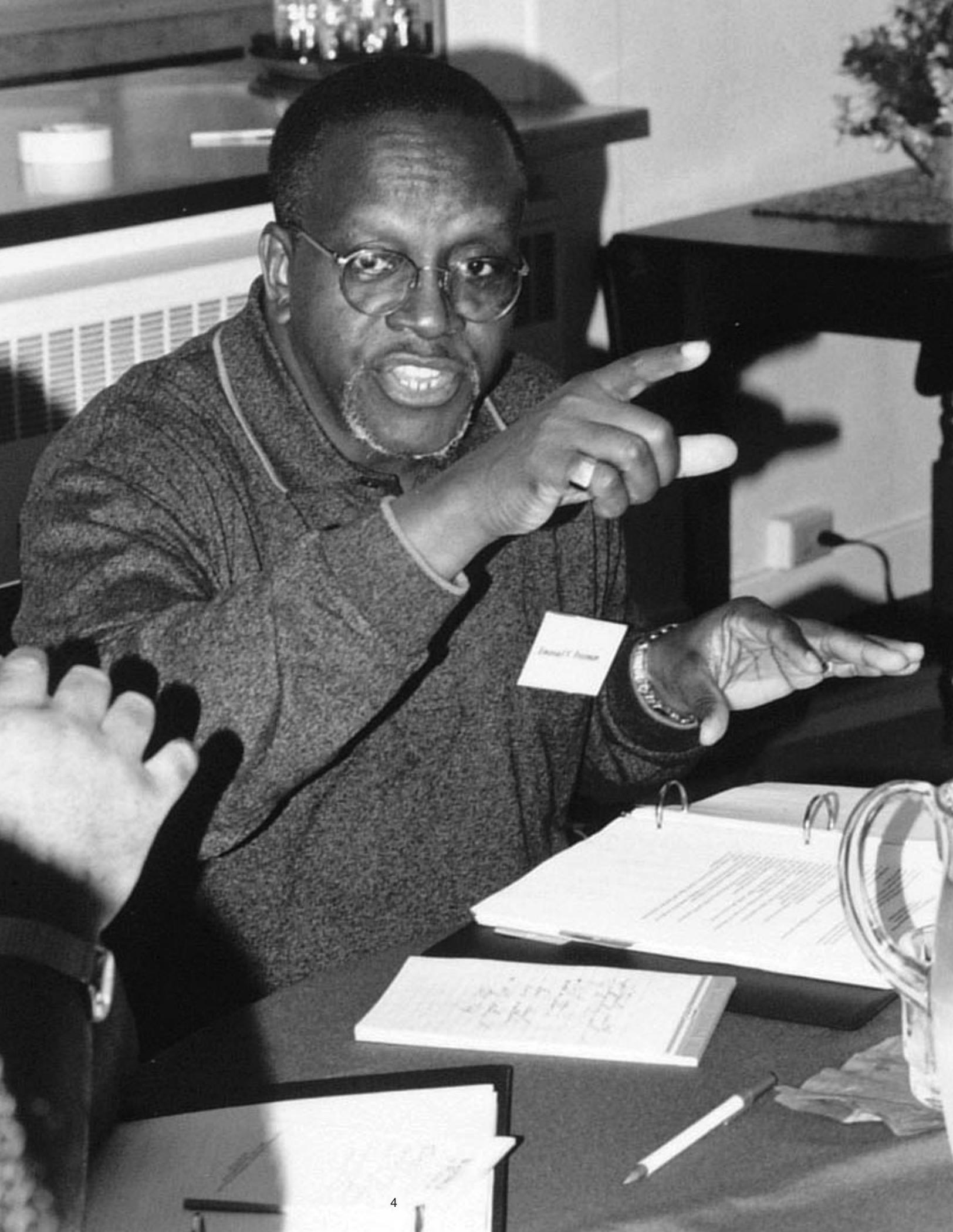
- Dudley Street Neighborhood Initiative, *Boston*;
- NEWSED Community Development Corporation, *Denver*;
- Warren/Conner Development Coalition, *Detroit*;
- Germantown Settlement, *Philadelphia*; and
- Marshall Heights Community Development Organization, *Washington, D.C.*

Leaders in these five communities have helped create a consistent framework for discussing and comparing leadership development techniques. All five organizations had been developing community leadership successfully for years before RCI came along. RCI allowed them to deliberately employ their successful techniques and expand the use of formal leadership training mechanisms.

At the invitation of the Annie E. Casey Foundation (AECF), The Development Training Institute (DTI) reviewed the leadership development processes at the five RCI sites. DTI has been training community development practitioners and neighborhood residents in leadership skills and community-based neighborhood revitalization since 1981. To conduct this study of leadership development, DTI visited all five RCI sites, interviewing staff of the RCI lead organizations as well as leaders and other participants in the rebuilding process. DTI staff also attended several RCI cross-site conferences and interviewed Casey Foundation staff.



Our study resulted in the creation of a conceptual framework that helps people better understand community-based leadership development. We hope that this framework will bring some order to the myriad leadership development activities that have occurred at the five RCI sites and in other neighborhoods in transformation. Another result is a series of lessons for organizations that fund collaborative transformation efforts in communities.



Meeting the Leadership Challenges of Building a Collaborative

Through the Rebuilding Communities Initiative, the Casey Foundation sought to help five communities put in place a sustainable leadership team capable of moving forward with a common vision. (See Appendix for more detailed background on RCI.) This team is expected to advocate for changes that would improve the lives of the community's most vulnerable children, youth, and families. The underlying assumption is that meaningful, long-term community change requires strong, sustained leadership. Community leaders – working separately and in coalition – can push for and achieve over time fundamental changes in agencies, institutions, and systems.

According to the theory of situational leadership, all good leaders develop a repertoire of leadership styles they can use in various situations. But because RCI required its five communities to establish new collaborative entities to guide the neighborhood rebuilding process, RCI leaders had to employ new leadership styles, different from those that were used successfully in the past. Some executive directors of community-based organizations, for example, had honed their confrontational skills to use in community-organizing situations. But while Alinsky's adage, "no permanent friends, no permanent enemies," may be appropriate to mass mobilizing, it is hardly appropriate in a collaborative where members have agreed they will work through all conflicts.

Another predominant leadership style had been entrepreneurship. Community-based development organizations typically identify an opportunity, sell potential investors on the project's feasibility, and negotiate to maximize the community's return. Collaboration changes the "shape of the table" from one at which the community negotiates from its side with a variety of partners on the other side, to one at which all parties sit on the same side.



Participants in RCI's community-based collaboratives include the lead community-based organization, with its staff, board, and executive director; collaborating organizations, each with its staffs, boards, and executive directors; residents and other neighborhood organizations; coaches and other technical assistance providers; and principal funders.

In the RCI experiences, all leaders were called on to expand their repertoires to include — or increase their proficiency in — collaborative leadership styles. In a collaborative, an initiator, for example, becomes more of a facilitator than a driving force. Leaders learn to initiate a venture and to recruit others to it without owning the venture. Leaders also learn conflict-resolution skills, including the ability to bring conflict into the open in a constructive way that does not immobilize the collaboration.

To say that RCI site leaders had to grow or acquire new leadership capabilities should not denigrate their previous leadership styles or abilities. In fact, the leaders of the RCI sites are remarkable for their abilities to broaden their repertoires of leadership styles without losing their own personal styles. The RCI sites include several examples of leaders simultaneously applying collaborative leadership for the RCI venture, while still exercising community-based development or community organizing styles in other situations. Inherent in situational leadership theory is the notion that no one style is better than another; rather, one style may be more appropriate for a particular set of circumstances.

Leaders have encountered the following challenges and opportunities in the five RCI community-based collaboratives:

- becoming a steward,
- building a community-driven governance structure for the collaboratives,
- empowering neighborhood residents,
- creating collaborations with human services and public agencies,
- reaching out to neighborhood youth,
- facilitating large-group processes,
- clarifying values, and
- drawing strength from spiritual renewal.

Becoming a steward

In some RCI sites, the lead community organization was asked to create a new community governance structure for the RCI activity, independent of the organization's existing structure. In those instances, the lead organization served as a steward of the new group and its subgroups and projects. The lead organization was neither the sponsor nor the leader. But it was responsible for seeing that these collaboratives functioned, became empowered, and remained independent of the lead organization in their decision making.

Building a community-driven governance structure for collaboratives

Several RCI sites have governance mechanisms or working groups composed of resident leaders and staff from the public or private agencies that work with the residents. These structures often suffer from an imbalance of power; the managerial language and corporate culture of agency representatives may intimidate resident leaders.

Without intervention, residents may remain silent and drop out because their voices are not heard. Alternatively, some residents may adopt a confrontational style, fixing on the power imbalance. They may focus, for example, on the lack of consultation or participation of residents, parents, or clients in a decision. Or they may complain about a lack of diversity in decision-making groups.

An effective intervention generally begins by increasing the resident leaders' capacity to govern a collaborative and manage its programs. It also involves teaching group-process techniques to bring about a more effective governing body.

Empowering neighborhood residents

Two manifestations of RCI empowerment of community residents are the ability of lead organizations to set up and facilitate forums for planning, and a high level of open community involvement in the community-building activities and budgeting process for RCI programs.

Another, similar challenge faced by the RCI collaboratives was finding ways to involve a broad range of residents in the crucial process of planning the community's transformation, and then budgeting RCI funds. It is easy for agency staff and other professionals to dominate planning and budgeting processes. The RCI sites found a variety of effective ways to generate open and meaningful involvement from a broad range of residents.

Creating collaborations with human services and public agencies

Many people have written of the challenges that arise when a group of agencies integrate services for a geographic area and allow residents to determine priorities, regardless of agency mission or funding. When such a resident-driven process is initiated by a community-based organization, there are even more leadership challenges. For example, how does the initiating organization gain credibility?

Reaching out to neighborhood youth

Bringing young people into the collaborative process is a major opportunity and a challenge. Young people often view a community-wide plan as an adult plan in which they have not participated. Several RCI sites found ways to involve youth in planning and carve out leadership roles for young people.

Facilitating large-group processes

It is one thing to call for an open, democratic, comprehensive community-planning process, and quite another to manage the involvement of large numbers of people in ways that get the job done. Among the skills needed to facilitate a large-group process are knowing how to: structure plenary sessions; create small-group activities that feed back into the plenary; design effective group exercises; manage the group process of both small- and large-group activities; and recruit and train volunteers to play roles as facilitators, recorders, reporters, and chairs.

Clarifying values

RCI site leaders speak frankly about the importance of a core set of values in leading the community. Both staff and resident leaders of RCI lead organizations worked to clarify the values on which their organizations were based and to express these values in RCI activities, including their collaborative work. The leadership challenge was to encourage participants to clarify their own values and then to find ways to develop a set of values for the collaborative as a whole.

Drawing strength from spiritual renewal

Many people involved in the RCI collaboratives speak about the importance of spiritual activity in their lives. This can be a leadership opportunity and a challenge. The leaders' spiritual activity nurtures the values required for comprehensive community transformation and renews their commitment to these values. These leaders often talk about their spiritually based values. RCI leaders point to religious roots and cultural and community celebrations as additional sources of renewal.

For some, spiritual renewal is religious in the traditional sense, and faith-based institutions are often active in community initiatives. For others, the spiritual does not come from organized religion, but still adds a transcendence to their work that these leaders find important, helping them to overcome the pain, failure, and despair that too often characterize their communities. The leadership challenge is to call on these spiritual values and strengths without generating tensions among people with different religious, cultural, or spiritual traditions.



Introduction to Paths of Leadership in Community Transformation

Building a strong leadership team requires work. Leaders must be identified, trained, and given opportunities to learn from the experience of leading. They must develop leadership skills, such as the ability to plan strategically, articulate a compelling vision, manage people and institutions through change processes, communicate persuasively with a variety of audiences, and facilitate volatile, community-driven collaboratives through the stages of organizational development.

In each of the five grant communities, RCI presented a host of opportunities and challenges, especially for residents, but also for mature, experienced organizations. Newly empowered residents — such as Glen Dixon, co-chair of Reclaiming Our Schools, a project of Detroit's Warren/Conner Development Coalition — discovered they suddenly needed to acquire whole new sets of interpersonal and leadership skills. At the same time, entrepreneurial nonprofit developers — such as Denver's NEWSSED Community Development Corporation— discovered they, too, needed to learn new leadership skills and modify others to participate effectively in a neighborhood-based collaborative.

The five RCI communities have used a wide variety of methods to help local leaders learn new skills and meet the challenges facing them. To help people understand these approaches to leadership development in neighborhoods in transition, the authors propose a conceptual framework called *The Paths to Leadership in Community Transformation*. As the accompanying figure illustrates, the framework is made up of five separate but interrelated sets of leadership development methods and the paths that connect them. RCI participants may move among the methods in any sequence and may even use several simultaneously.

These paths to community leadership development may follow a logical sequence. At other times, these leadership development processes may seem like they came from nowhere – a response to an immediate need that arose in a community or organization. For example, in Detroit, there was not enough time for the Warren/Conner Development Coalition to undertake a protracted board development process involving in-depth training programs. Instead, the steering committee had to move immediately to a high level of collaborative skill development to address fiscal and personnel issues in the Initiative's governance.

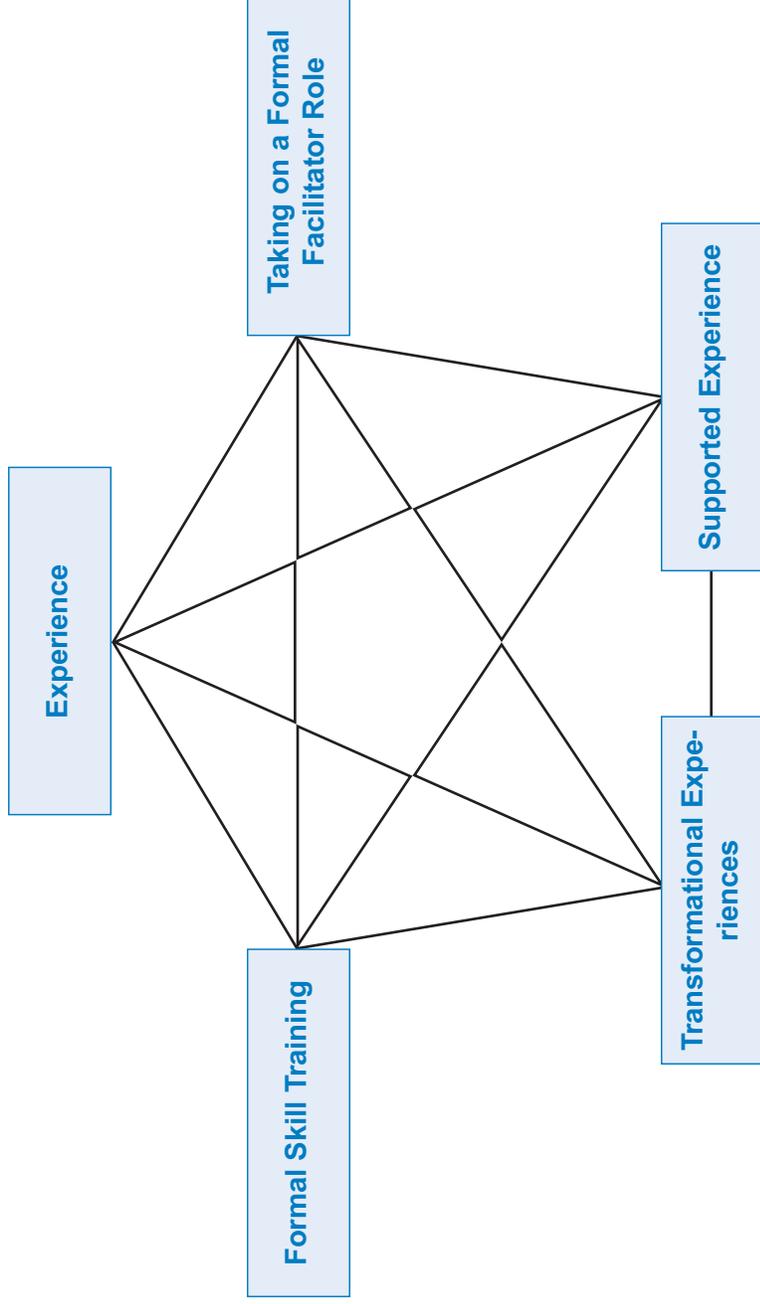
As illustrated, the paths to leadership include experience, supported experience, formal skill building, transformational experience, and taking on a formal facilitator role. They are described in more detail below and in the following sections.

Experience

New leaders in most situations do not have the benefit of training, formal advisors, or other supports. New leaders learn by doing. Even new leaders in older organizations may have minimal help learning leadership skills. Success, failure, and increased responsibility contribute to leadership learning. Leadership skills may be acquired by direct experience alone, the barest form of learning by doing. Some frequent experiences that build leadership are:

- acting as a leader,
- experiencing failure,
- receiving informal mentoring,
- gaining recognition,
- attending local conferences,
- participating in political campaigns, and
- leading on larger issues or in coalitions.

The RCI Paths of Leadership in Community Transformation



Formal Skill Training

- Personal development plan
- Formal training on techniques
- Coaching by trainer or organizer
- Participation in planning training
- Acting as trainer
- Speaking at conferences
- Reading on techniques

Transformational Experiences

- Profound experiences
- Deepening and shift in vision and style
- Common multi-day dynamic experience: centering for reflection
- Sharpening vision
- Intensifying motivation
- Clarifying values
- Interactive relationship building
- Analyzing and reflecting on leadership style
- Disclosing self in group

Experience

- Acting as leader
- Failure/Success
- Informal mentoring
- Recognition
- Attending local conferences
- Political campaigns
- Lead larger issues or coalitions

Supported Experience

- Deliberate mentoring
- Structured reflection
- Coaching by trainer or organizer
- Leaders group retreat
- Attending national or regional conferences
- Serving as mentor or trainer
- Recruitment and preparation for leadership in more complex organization
- Task forces and boards with professionals, managers and private sector leaders

Taking on a Formal Facilitator Role

- Train the Trainers program
- Supervised practice
- Coached training design
- Acting as evaluator
- Co-facilitating with experienced trainer
- Apply professional:
 - knowledge
 - skill
 - ethics

Supported Experience

Among the RCI sites, and in community-based organizations in general, the most prevalent and reliable leadership development system involves a series of supports for leaders who are already learning through experience. These supports are no substitute for experience, however. Instead they supplement experience through formal and informal arrangements that help leaders expand their knowledge and capability. Some supported experience approaches include:

- deliberate mentoring,
- structured reflection,
- coaching by a trainer or organizer,
- leading a group retreat,
- attending national or regional conferences,
- serving as a mentor or trainer,
- recruitment and preparation for leadership in a more complex organization, and
- serving on task forces and boards with professionals, managers, and private-sector leaders.

Formal Skill Building

DTI found that all the RCI sites want to improve the capabilities of their existing leaders and shorten the learning curve for new leaders by incorporating formal leadership training with existing supported leadership experience. Every experienced leader has acquired identifiable leadership skills and techniques that can be taught through formal skill-training sessions. Sometimes such sessions are arranged by a specific organization for its own leaders; in other instances, the sessions are offered for leaders from a variety of organizations. Some examples of skill-building help are:

- formal workshops,
- short board training sessions before meetings,
- leadership courses,
- books on leadership, and
- video and audiotapes.

Transformational Experience

Many leaders report a specific, profound moment or event in their leadership career that caused them to take stock of their leadership work, recommit themselves more deeply, and move to higher levels of leadership. Community building requires such shifts in both volunteer leaders and staff practitioners.

For some, the transforming moment was a major success or failure or a crisis or challenge in which they played a role. For others, the moment was a structured leadership program. In either case, the key elements of transformation are:

- reconsidering of a past experience;
- sharpening vision;
- intensifying motivation;
- clarifying values;
- analyzing, reflecting on, and refining leadership style; and
- increasing confidence in personal capability.





Transformational leadership development programs often use the following mechanisms:

- sharing a common, multi-day, dynamic experience;
- personal reflection;
- visioning and sharing vision;
- interacting to build relationships;
- using tools of analysis to determine leadership style, and
- disclosing oneself in a group.

Taking on a Formal Facilitator Role

Occasionally a community leader takes on a formal facilitator role in a group that provides leadership development. The leader may become a staff person in a community organization, a formal trainer of leaders, or a formal facilitator in a group. Such individuals often become proficient in supporting leadership development informally and in designing, managing, and implementing formal training programs and facilitated meetings. Elements of a formal facilitator role frequently include:

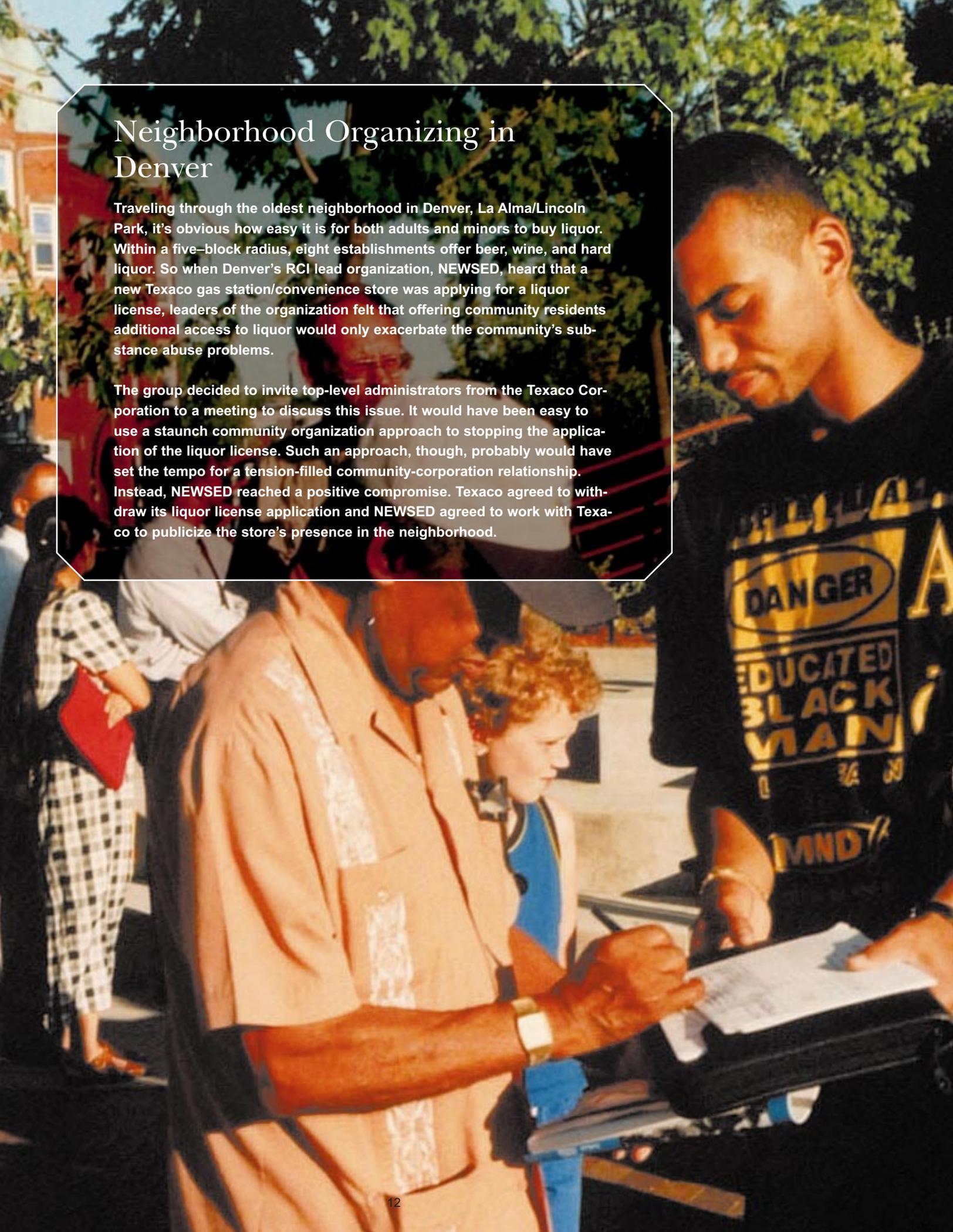
- a train-the-trainers program;
- supervised practice;
- coached training design;
- acting as evaluator;
- co-facilitating with an experienced trainer; and
- applying professional knowledge, skill, and ethics.

The following sections contain more detailed information on the five paths to leadership.

Neighborhood Organizing in Denver

Traveling through the oldest neighborhood in Denver, La Alma/Lincoln Park, it's obvious how easy it is for both adults and minors to buy liquor. Within a five-block radius, eight establishments offer beer, wine, and hard liquor. So when Denver's RCI lead organization, NEWSSED, heard that a new Texaco gas station/convenience store was applying for a liquor license, leaders of the organization felt that offering community residents additional access to liquor would only exacerbate the community's substance abuse problems.

The group decided to invite top-level administrators from the Texaco Corporation to a meeting to discuss this issue. It would have been easy to use a staunch community organization approach to stopping the application of the liquor license. Such an approach, though, probably would have set the tempo for a tension-filled community-corporation relationship. Instead, NEWSSED reached a positive compromise. Texaco agreed to withdraw its liquor license application and NEWSSED agreed to work with Texaco to publicize the store's presence in the neighborhood.





Experience and Supported Experience

By far the most common leadership development pathway is the experience of leading. Some problem, challenge, or opportunity confronts a community, and a group of people moves to address it. Different individuals play different leadership roles. Some people set the agenda and convene the group. Some act as public spokespeople. Some maintain the group's harmony and process. Some recruit new leaders, and still others distribute flyers, organize telephone trees, and ferry participants to meetings. The efficacy of learning leadership by leading is verified by many leadership experts in the United States (For more, see John Gardner's *Community Building* and E. Burt Knauft, Renee A. Berger, and Sandra T. Gray's *Profiles of Excellence*). The RCI sites are continuing in this tradition.

Leaders may emerge from an existing group in which they have learned from role models and mentors. Other leaders emerge in new organizations to fill a leadership vacuum. Most often, the early accomplishments of new leaders and groups are modest. But if the group continues beyond its initial victories, leadership capabilities may be expanded through subsequent challenges.

As leaders participate in one community fight after another, they expand their knowledge and skills and are forced to articulate a vision and clarify their values. The next stage is often a formal leadership position in a larger community organization, or engagement with other leaders in a coalition that takes familiar issues to a larger scale of organizing. Some leaders are appointed to boards and commissions or take positions in complex, large organizations. A few run for public office or play key political campaign roles. Finally, some take on informal leadership development roles as trainers or facilitators.

All of the RCI sites involve experienced and mature organizations, so developing leadership skills through experience alone is rare. Instead, the most prevalent and reliable system of leadership development in the five sites was the creation of supports for leaders who learn by doing – supported experience. Leadership supports include mentoring and structured reflection, having staff or consultants coach and advise leaders, and creating special group events, such as board retreats, to develop the organization and its individual leaders. RCI resident leaders and staff reported that attending national and regional conferences, the RCI's cross-site conferences, and other national events helped build their knowledge, confidence, and leadership skills.

Two aspects of the RCI projects illustrate the use of supported experience: neighborhood organizing and planning activities.

Neighborhood Organizing

For most community residents who become leaders, their initiation into formal leadership roles is through community organizing around small-scale neighborhood or service delivery issues. Coached by more experienced leaders and professionals with expertise in leadership development (sometimes called organizers or trainers), residents learn about leadership by playing various roles in community campaigns.

For the first time in many years, the RCI lead organizations dedicated some staff to grassroots community organizing. These dedicated staff identified potential new leaders for neighborhood issues, coached these new leaders through their first issue campaigns, and helped them to form permanent block clubs and other small organizations. They helped the new leaders set agendas, conduct meetings, and mobilize people. They convened small meetings to prepare for larger meetings, helped community residents identify leadership roles, and provided advice and a sounding board for the new leaders.

As each challenge develops, leaders must grow. Encouragement, advice, and the reassuring presence of an expert coach help leaders act in new ways. With such support, leaders take on ever more sophisticated roles. The best leaders are lifelong learners.

Neighborhood Planning in Boston

In 1984, residents of the Dudley Street neighborhood in Boston came together to resist the patterns of abandonment, disinvestment, and arson fires that had physically and spiritually devastated this diverse, 1.5 square mile neighborhood of 24,000 African American, Latino, Cape Verdean, and white residents. Turning planning on its head, residents created a comprehensive vision for a vibrant urban village. They then gained control over the vacant land – the area had 1,300 vacant lots – in the most devastated parts of the neighborhood by obtaining eminent domain authority from the city. Residents worked with partners to build new housing, community gardens, an elegant town common, and new and improved play spaces.



Planning Activities

RCI planning activities represented new opportunities for leadership development. This planning called on existing leaders to play new roles and created many opportunities for new leaders to emerge. All sites conducted a broadly participatory process to create or update a community plan, and a wide variety of roles for new leaders were available. Moreover, the RCI agenda focused the groups on family and human services more than they had in the past. Even existing leaders were challenged to master new territory, navigate a different set of relationships, and, in some cases, assume completely new leadership roles.

RCI planning activities required sophisticated leadership capabilities. The sites used “supported experience” methods to help leaders address the challenges of becoming a steward for a new entity, managing normal conflict, and building accountability.

Becoming a steward for a new entity

One major leadership challenge for which supported experience proved useful was building community governance structures, which required significant leadership skills. Initially, AECF staff, who emphasized the need for a broadly participatory structure, coached the staffs of the five RCI lead organizations. Foundation staff also explored whether the lead organizations’ existing structures were adequate for open, democratic participation in a comprehensive planning process.

In Boston, the Dudley Street Neighborhood Initiative already had broad community participation in its planning activities, so did not need to create a separate collaborative. And in Washington, D.C, the Marshall Heights Community Development Organization drew members from its board of directors to participate in RCI. In the other three sites, separate collaboratives were created.

The formative experiences of the RCI lead organizations in Denver, Detroit, Philadelphia, and Washington had been confrontational, arising from power-oriented community organizing or from competitive, market-oriented, community-based development. Therefore, the lead organizations had to make the transition to collaboration and stewardship. The difficulty of such a transition should not be underestimated; the sites’ successes are remarkable.

The relationship of the RCI organizations with the new collaboratives might best be characterized as stewardship. The RCI lead organizations promoted and supported the new entities, but tried not to manipulate or control them. This was not an easy role. It is very difficult for the leader of an existing organization to look beyond the interests and goals of that organization. In some sites a great deal of work had to be done by technical assistance providers and/or the Foundation to make sure the lead organization played a stewardship role. Fortunately, AECF anticipated this struggle and set aside time for the collaborative process to unfold.

Stewardship is daunting; a steward cannot be completely hands off. To be effective, a steward needs to have a vision of what the new forum can become and be able to share that vision with emerging leaders. New leaders, in turn, internalize and reformulate that vision as their own. A steward needs to anticipate the dilemmas of organizational development without manipulating the entity, and identify within the forum new leaders who have the skills to meet all the institutional challenges. A steward must encourage new leaders to emerge and let those leaders solve problems on their own.

We talk glibly about *servant leadership* when we describe the role of leaders in a group. How much more difficult it is to be the servant leader of someone else’s group! This is the heart of stewardship: being committed to building an independent and capable entity that may not endorse your organization’s activities when it sets and acts on its own goals.



Stages in Organizational Growth

Organizational development experts at the University of Iowa suggest that organizations and groups move through predictable growth stages. Understanding these stages can be extremely helpful for leaders, giving them perspective when normal tensions arise. Through RCI, the Casey Foundation helped community leaders better understand the stages. The first stage comes during the formation of the organization – many issues arise when decisions about the organization’s structure, function, and administration must be made. For example, how should the organization be structured to get the work done? Or what will be the board’s formal roles and responsibilities?

The numerous issues involved in forming a collaborative lead almost inevitably to some conflict and differences. This period of conflict has been described as *storming* and is the next stage of organizational growth. Conflict must be managed and norms must be developed to insure that every conflict does not lead to crisis. This process of developing norms within the collaborative is the third stage and it is called *norming*. When the norming process is complete, the collaborative can attend to the tasks of implementing its plans. This fourth stage is called *performing*.

To these four stages of organizational development, Sentwali Aiyetoro adds still another: *transforming*. Transforming is the recognition of a shift in an organization’s consciousness, and the movement of the organization to a higher level of performance. Transforming is required to propel the Initiative dynamically towards its mission and to move a group from planning to implementation.



Managing normal conflict

In almost all RCI sites, differences arose between the RCI lead organization and the new governance structures, as well as within the governance forums themselves. Conflict at this stage of building a community-based collaborative is predictable, healthy, and, arguably, essential. Managing these early conflicts actually helped to normalize power relations in the governance process and move the communities toward the implementation phase of RCI.

Building accountability

The third RCI leadership challenge that required supported experience was the groups' new willingness to hold volunteer leaders accountable. Past community participation had not evolved to the point where volunteer leaders were held accountable, or where uncomfortable questions were raised. In the RCI process, leaders became more active, more committed to, and more capable of real discussion. No longer would they simply listen to committee reports and rubber stamp them. Facilitators and staff helped resident leaders create ground rules and protocols, define public commitments, and provided encouragement when leaders held each other accountable for coming up short.

Skill-Building in Denver, Detroit, and Boston

A number of RCI communities have established formal skill-building efforts. For example, in Denver, the PODER Leadership Development Program's mission is to increase the capacity of Westside residents to plan together effectively for the future, to affect the management and growth of the initiative and to assess and improve overall community life. The class format is eight, four-hour, bi-weekly sessions and a retreat, for a total run of 18 weeks. Evaluations from the participants of the inaugural class have been used to revise the programming. This ensures the PODER leadership development program is providing meaningful and relevant training.

Project LEAD, a project of Detroit's Warren/Conner Development Coalition, addresses issues such as collaboration, strategic planning, critical thinking, influencing government, leadership, power and advocacy. Most of the instructors are Eastside residents with proven community stature. More than 600 people have graduated from Project LEAD since it was founded 12 years ago, many of whom have gone on to leadership positions in community-based organizations throughout Detroit's Eastside.

The Dudley Street Neighborhood Initiative in Boston runs a Resident Development Institute, which serves as a school for residents to gain the skills, knowledge and confidence needed to be leaders of revitalization as well as a repository of the neighborhood's history and revitalization experiences. The Institute includes training for community residents to learn how to conduct learning needs assessments, design curriculum, facilitate learning sessions and conduct evaluations based on understanding various adult learning styles. The underlying philosophy is for residents to be the teachers.



Formal Skill Building

Most RCI sites have shown that formal training is an excellent supplement to existing supports for new leaders. Every experienced leader has acquired knowledge, leadership skills, and techniques that can be taught through formal skill-training sessions. In the RCI communities, formal training usually followed a period of learning through experience with supports. Formal leadership training sessions also helped the new collaborative governance structures function better. This was especially true for those that call on community residents to operate as peers with staff of service-delivery agencies and private corporations. The training often helped the community leaders feel more comfortable in these settings.

Sometimes skill-training sessions are developed specifically for the leaders of a particular organization. In other instances, they are offered to leaders from many different organizations. In the latter case, the sponsors of the training sessions may be community organizations, technical assistance organizations, institutions of higher education, or funding intermediaries such as United Way. Textbooks, workbooks, and video materials are available to help teach some of the needed skills. Some topics, such as the legal responsibilities of boards of directors, require participants to acquire a new body of knowledge. Other topics, like running meetings, working with the media, or managing conflict, require participants to learn skills rather than memorize principles or understand theories.

Training session design issues

Formal skill building in an RCI setting raises three immediate issues: scheduling, single- or multi-organization training, and participant diversity.

Scheduling

Each RCI site faces a special challenge in accommodating leaders' desires to accelerate leadership development through formal skill building. The busy lives of community residents limit their availability, and make it difficult to schedule training. One site experimented with several alternatives and found success with short training sessions held before the business portion of a task force, committee, or board meeting. Such a design seems to attract a higher percentage of board (or other) members than separate, longer training sessions.

Unfortunately, good training materials for such short sessions are hard to find. Materials available on the open market (e.g., from the National Center for Nonprofit Boards) often are not sensitive to the culture of a community or the realities of a community organization. In addition, few affordable trainers are available for such short-term, local engagements.

Currently, all five RCI sites are in some stage of creating and using modules for leadership training. Boston's Dudley Street Neighborhood Initiative (DSNI), for example, is designing a program to prepare volunteer leaders to deliver training modules. RCI sites conducted training on an array of topics, including:

- Roles and responsibilities of members of the governance structure,
- ethics in organizations,
- theories in leadership styles,
- cultural competency in organizations,
- team building,
- organizational culture,
- decision making,
- financial management and budgets,
- how to run an effective meeting,

- conflict resolution,
- group problem solving,
- committees and organizational structures,
- resource development,
- legal responsibilities of directors,
- leadership roles in a group, and
- working with consultants.



Single- or multi-organization training

The most effective training programs seem to be those that are provided for all the leaders of a single organization. By training all leaders at the same time, the training environment can contribute to identifying and resolving problems in the organization's functioning. It can also establish mutual accountability among participants. At a minimum, the common training experience allows participants in subsequent real-life meetings to use a commonly understood vocabulary. Most RCI sites treated the collaborative entity as a single organization and trained all leaders together, rather than separately training the leaders of each of the collaborative's member organizations.

Participant diversity

An additional training challenge comes from the RCI collaboration mechanism. In collaboration structures that combine professionals and agency managers with community or client/beneficiary representatives, lay members often are not as effective as they would like to be in making their voices heard and shaping policy. Perhaps the agency representatives also are distressed that they are not getting the highest level of community input and, consequently, not sharing power effectively. Effective training addresses both the professional and the client sides of the collaboration.

RCI successes with formal skill building

The following sections illustrate instances in which RCI sites used formal skill-building methods to develop leadership and to address three leadership challenges: boosting participation, establishing parity, and expanding organizational capability.

Boosting participation

Slow board growth is common in voluntary organizations. It is only natural that new members hesitate to participate vigorously until they understand the personalities, organizational culture, and agenda of the new group. This is especially true where the new participants have little experience serving on governance structures. Incorporation of new leaders is essential to community empowerment and, thus, one of its common challenges. Nonprofit organizations frequently undertake board training to accelerate the learning of new members and establish a level of comfort with roles and expectations among all participants.

In Boston, for example, DSNI contracted with a nationally known firm experienced in leadership development for both corporations and non-profit organizations. The firm put on a two-day formal training program using a selection of its standard training materials chosen by a DSNI steering committee. The program covered the roles and responsibilities of boards, group procedures, leadership roles, and conflict resolution. As a result of the training, resident leaders emerged not only better equipped, but also fused into a working group with its own vocabulary and set of practices to apply in the collaborative forum. Subsequently, those who participated in the training were able to use the diagnostic methodology they had learned to detect conflict and other obstacles to effective group process, and to resolve them quickly.

In Denver, NEWSSED used an outside consultant to facilitate meetings. The consultant provided mini-training sessions in the context of the group process on issues that were immobilizing the collaboration. The consultant used some other standard training formats, choosing ones that would be most helpful in addressing the issues of immediate concern to the group. She often discussed the training sessions in advance with the participants or a steering committee. It proved useful in Denver, as in most situations, to distinguish the part of the meeting devoted to training from the part that was a work session. During the training, the facilitator and participants could focus on their roles as trainer or student. In a learning session, for example, participants are more willing to “dare to be dumb” than they are in a work session when there is a serious matter to be resolved.

Establishing parity

Lack of parity among members of a governance structure is normal when community residents or clients are working with professionals from agencies and public institutions. Professionalism, experience, and disparities in authority may diminish resident participation. The likely attitude of residents is either a reluctance to participate or aggressive participation calculated to wrest power from the professionals. Both attitudes prevent the group from accomplishing its mission effectively.

Training has often proven effective in providing all members of a collaborative with the skills necessary to operate in this unique setting. Such training must recognize that it is not only the community residents who need assistance, but the agency and corporate representatives, as well. Collaborative governance structures can bring together individuals from different cultures, income levels, and ethnic backgrounds. Few people in America today know how to work effectively and equitably in such a diverse structure.

Expanding organizational capability

While RCI called for a broadly representative, highly participatory, comprehensive governance structure, Boston's DSNI did not need to create a new entity. DSNI had always had such a governance structure, and DSNI was widely recognized for its effective, democratic governance structure. Peter Medoff's book, *Streets of Hope*, is just one of the print and television documentaries about DSNI's work.

Unlike the other RCI lead organizations, DSNI does not build housing or provide services. Instead, it provides direction to other institutions carrying out the community's plan for the Dudley neighborhood. For example, when DSNI acquire power of eminent domain over land in the community, it retreated from conducting development activities when it discovered that taking on the role of community-based developer interfered with its governance role. After many years, DSNI recognized that it needed new blood and more community participation as well as refinements to its original community plan. So DSNI used the opportunities presented by RCI to revise its plan and broaden its facilitating skills. A formal training program played a key role in helping residents participate actively in the planning process.

In the original DSNI process, community leaders relied on an outside facilitator. With RCI funding, DSNI staff became facilitators themselves, working to internalize and make permanent their new skills. Through a series of community meetings — both large-scale assemblies and small groups — DSNI created a revised plan for the community and identified a number of new participants. Some of those participants became new board members and others became active leaders of a task force set up to plan a new recreation center.

DSNI used a formal training program, led by a board member with years of professional facilitation experience, to prepare board and staff members for their new roles. The training program combined skill development with detailed planning (scripting) of each meeting, along with extensive feedback and reflection sessions.



Transformational Experience in Detroit

Margaree Williams' transformational experience occurred several years ago as she walked through her neighborhood on Detroit's East Side, where she has lived all her life. She was tired of drugs, tired of violence, tired of children wandering the streets, tired of seniors afraid to leave their buildings, tired of illegal dumping, tired of unkempt homes and streets.

Margaree asked herself "Am I going to remain tired or am I going to make a difference?" Today, Margaree is well known in her community as an activist, friend, and visionary, and as president of Communities for Change, a group organized to revitalize the neighborhood. Margaree and a friend started the group by knocking on doors throughout the community to recruit and motivate fellow neighbors to remember, as she says, the "forgotten neighborhood."

Communities for Change has renovated a senior citizen's home, reclaimed a neighborhood park, instituted a senior citizen errand program, and hosted a community-wide Afrocentric Awards Banquet for community members and senior who contributed outstanding service.

Margaree and Communities for Change formed a partnership with RCI in Detroit after a steering committee member spotted her and other group members cleaning the neighborhood streets. "We organize a neighborhood cleanup because our mothers would not have allowed us or our children to grow up on or play on dirty streets, or in a filthy environment," Margaree explained. Margaree's commitment to community work comes from the desire to help others and return her community to its strong roots. Her involvement in RCI is based on hope.



Transformational Experiences

Developing an effective collaborative to bring about comprehensive change requires more than enhancing leadership skills. Collaboration requires a fundamental shift or transformation in the consciousness of leaders. Leaders must come to understand the process of comprehensive community revitalization and the potential for success. They also must understand why empowering the community is so crucial to building effective alliances and rebuilding communities. Such a transformation helps leaders get beyond their natural focus on their home organization or neighborhood and see themselves as part of a broader movement. It also helps leaders to clarify the values that motivate and give direction to their work. Transformational experiences have occurred among the leaders of all five RCI sites.

A transformation may be circumstantial, the result of a life changing experience, for example. Or the shift may be deliberately induced through training programs and workshops such as DTI's Leadership and Management Program (LAMP) or the Outward Bound program. LAMP participants are moved to sharpen their vision, apply their motivation, clarify their values, and develop their sense of wholeness and community. The Outward Bound experience invites participants to build a strong team to overcome one natural obstacle after another.

Leadership experiences that profoundly transform individual leaders are not unique to RCI sites or to community collaborations. One can easily see a parallel in the civil rights movement. For example, movement leaders who attended programs of the Highlander Folk Center often described those experiences as having changed their lives and their leadership capabilities. Highlander used structured, dynamic group experiences to facilitate participants' personal confrontations, reflection, and commitment, a process Highlander characterized as the transformation of leaders. In facilitating such transformations, Highlander was similar to LAMP. But even activists who never participated in formal programs talk about their experiences during the civil rights movement as transformational.



Clarifying values

RCI community leaders are respected and emulated not only for their technical skills, but also because they can articulate a clear vision and reflect a set of core values through their actions. The most prized values are openness, honest collaboration, respect for all in the process, hope for the community's future, and patience and persistence in the face of adversity and inertia.

During DTI's visits to the five sites, resident leaders spoke of the need to recognize community values and acknowledge traditions, so that planning would be authentic and accountable to the community's history. One leader noted that keeping community values and beliefs in mind might be as simple as planting flowers, sweeping streets, or respecting people's property, or as complex as incorporating spirituality. Caring for one's neighbors and uniting with neighbors to solve problems were identified at a cross-site conference as central community values.

In Boston, DSNI talked of translating values into community standards, such as limitations on parking. In Philadelphia, Germantown's commitment to community empowerment was reflected in its insistence that parents and community representatives make up 51 percent of the membership of every advisory committee. Germantown reported that its mission statement became a criterion for selecting among alternative activities. The group began to ask which alternative would best fulfill the organization's mission, and the group's mission became more defined as the group remained focused on it.

DSNI, as well as Washington's Marshall Heights and other sites, reported that a respect for diversity meant valuing the knowledge, experience, and input of senior citizens; respecting the traditions of different groups within the community; and allowing for a variety of outcomes.

Both leaders and staff of lead organizations noted that frequent reflection on community values is part of leadership development. Sessions in clarifying values served to remind the community of its values, project the right behaviors (practice what we preach), and encourage creative strategies that reflect the old ways to the new generation.

Among the outcomes of values-centered community activity were intergenerational programs to reunite the community; the celebration of cultural traditions that teach positive works and pride in oneself (e.g., Kwanza); incorporation of youth through new ideas; and alternation of leadership responsibilities among co-chairs. Several leaders noted that the value clarification process might challenge an individual's values, and leaders must be prepared to accept outcomes they themselves would not have chosen.

Balancing value dilemmas

In a cross-site conference, leaders from the five RCI sites spoke pointedly and painfully about the difficulty of balancing two value orientations: self-help and societal reform. They spoke of the importance of projecting to the community a sense of self-reliance and resilient problem solving that draws on the community's inherent assets. The leaders wanted to be careful that any analysis of community problems or poverty that blamed institutional obstacles, the economic system, or racism in America not provide an excuse for further inaction. Both staff and leaders of the lead organizations expressed the belief that a community has an innate ability to heal itself. More importantly, the leaders projected their belief in action, rejecting the cynicism of those who asserted, "The system will never change, so why bother trying?"

Once again, the key is for leaders to have opportunities to place on the table value issues such as these. Opportunities to discuss values became part of both the leadership development and planning processes at several RCI sites. The result was a renewed commitment to overcoming obstacles and making change happen.

Spiritual renewal

Transformational experiences bring people to a higher level of insight that is most often collaborative, visionary, and community-centered. Such experiences often take the form of spiritual or social awakenings, where individuals or whole groups respond to a charismatic speaker or an emotionally stirring social event. The RCI sites have shown that transformational experiences also can be elicited through intentional, well-planned leadership development programs.

RCI resident leaders at a cross-site conference spoke eloquently of the spiritual roots of their value commitments and of the importance of spiritual renewal in their lives. For most of them, their spirituality was rooted in an organized religious tradition. This is especially true for people from cultures in which religion is readily combined with everyday life. Some people who emphasize the need to separate religion and secular life will feel uncomfortable with the spiritual and religious allusions of community leaders. But their spirituality and religious commitment have helped to transform many leaders and provided valuable support to them as they face the difficulties involved in community transformation.

The strength to keep going

RCI resident leaders all recognized that the causes of community problems often lie deep in our social systems, including the economic system. They found themselves preaching the messages, "We need to work together to change the system," and "We need to reform service systems so they work for residents rather than for the institution's self-interest."

For example, resident leaders were painfully aware of racial discrimination and institutionalized racism as significant barriers to community progress, even to the efforts of comprehensive community building within RCI. Many spoke of their need for spiritual grounding to enable them to handle that pain and anger and to lead their communities. The leaders also spoke of the power of stories, poems, and community celebrations in helping them to acknowledge the difficulties without despairing or becoming immobilized.

Community transformation is by definition long-term. It may require getting to the point where a person can confront some basic limitations of the American system. Leaders spoke of transformational experiences, both formal and informal, as including moments that renewed their own commitment. The leaders often referred to the Christian idea that faith is confidence in things unseen.





Taking on a Formal Facilitator Role

Most experienced leaders act in ways that facilitate group processes. In the RCI sites, creating comprehensive community collaborations requires leaders at all levels to become better at facilitating group processes such as large, participatory community-planning sessions or inter-agency partnerships for developing new programs.

All the RCI groups prize the facilitating skills they have developed as a result of their RCI participation. In fact, the groups often distinguish the style of leadership used in RCI collaborations from styles use in other situations by using the term *facilitating* rather than *running meetings*, *getting a project done*, or *giving direction*. NEWSSED, for example, adopted a theoretical framework called *facilitative leadership* as its core leadership concept. And DSNI created the Resident Development Institute, with one of its first projects being a facilitator learning seminar.

A new role

Whether educated through experience, supported experience, formal skill building, or transformational experiences, all leaders of comprehensive community transformation activities will acquire facilitating skills over time. Another pathway for leaders to develop facilitation ability, however, is for them to act as a facilitator or trainer in a structured group process or training event. By doing so, the facilitator or trainer assumes a different position within the group process.

The formal facilitator or trainer is responsible for designing the group process, albeit in a participatory manner. The facilitator or trainer is responsible for managing the process and is not free to be simply a participant. In a sense, the facilitator or trainer is both part of the group and outside of it. While a good trainer or facilitator recognizes that he or she is not the only facilitator or trainer in the group, he or she is in a special role by having been designated for that function.

The small percentage of leaders who choose to become formal facilitators or trainers, whether in their own organization or outside it, place themselves in a different relationship to the other participants. They commit themselves to learning a body of knowledge, polishing professional skills, and to being governed by a code of behavior and ethics.

Many leaders shy away from playing a formal training or facilitating role, specifically because it requires a new kind of group participation. There is nothing inappropriate in most leaders' hesitation to move into a formal role. Those who do move into such a role, however, enter a new pathway for heightening certain leadership skills.

Special skills

Professional facilitators or trainers have their own specialized knowledge, skill, and code of ethics. In fact, there is a recognized body of knowledge involving group dynamics for facilitating adult learning and training, and there is a set of clearly identifiable skills that must be acquired to play each role, with levels of proficiency for which professionals may become certified or licensed. Finally, there is a code of ethics for professional facilitating or training that governs practice and behavior.

For example, facilitators must keep their own opinions out of issues being debated by the group. This helps to draw out and reflect the participants' opinions accurately and helps the group arrive at a consensus. Skilled facilitators often write down the exact words participants use rather than summarizing each comment in their own words.

Formal training programs

While all RCI sites demonstrate a wide variety of experiences that have improved the facilitating or training skills of existing leaders, only a few set up formal programs. Boston's DSNI, for one, has made its Resident Development Institute its *engine of change* for implementing its RCI plan. DSNI will attempt to recruit experienced community leaders who will be trained to lead formal skill-development sessions for emerging leaders.

A second formal program has been set up by the Warren/Conner Development Coalition in Detroit. While the organization has often moved community leaders to staff positions, under RCI it began to do so in a more systematic way. It has long recognized that community residents with leadership experience could form a natural pool of talent to meet ongoing staff needs. Warren/Conner also recognized that jobs in community development offer a potential career pathway for underemployed community residents.

Warren/Conner began to use its Volunteers in Service to American (VISTA) positions to hire community leaders for two-year staff positions. The organization enriched the VISTA activity by providing the new staffers with training and career counseling. Warren/Conner even convinced the Michigan VISTA office to use many VISTA slots as a way to demonstrate that volunteers can be a talent pool for community development work in East Detroit and beyond. Over the years, the program has produced several people who now play critical staff roles in Warren/Conner and other Detroit organizations.

The challenge of shifting from leader to facilitator

It is often difficult for people to change roles in a group and for the group to adjust to an individual's new role. For example, a person in a leadership role may have been looked to in the past for direction, but as facilitator, that person must relinquish the leadership role and allow others to fill it. Some trainers of facilitators believe it is almost impossible for people who have been strong leaders in a group to change their role, or for the group to allow them to do so.

Critics cite many examples in which hiring community leaders to fill staff positions has undermined the continuous empowerment of a growing group of community residents. In fact, in one major foundation initiative with which the authors have experience, successful parent leaders lost their ability to mobilize other parents when they moved from volunteer positions to paid staff positions. The other parents no longer felt compelled to volunteer their time because they began to view the former leaders as just doing a job, or as part of the problem institution.

Acting as facilitators outside of their own organizations has helped staff leaders hone their leadership skills. Away from home, the issues involved in transitioning to a new role are absent.

For years, experienced staff members of community-based organizations have found that part-time consulting work as facilitators or trainers is a valuable professional development experience as well as an income supplement. Several staff members of RCI organizations do such consulting work. The experience is less common for community resident leaders.



The philosophy of empowerment

Warren/Conner's and DSNi's programs to help community leaders become educators of new leaders would be recognized in professional training circles as *training trainers*. The model they are using is a standard train-the-trainer program, similar to those used around the world.

The RCI sites, however, have rejected the use of *trainer* terminology, preferring instead the term *facilitator*. As DSNi's May Louie explains, the word *trainer* implies a hierarchy and an educational model of transferring knowledge from the trainer to the participants. "We believe that all participants in a training bring a capacity to contribute," she said. "We are training individuals who can facilitate training a community." The groups believe that *facilitator* terminology reflects more accurately their principles of adult learning than does *trainer* terminology.

Informal training methods

While some RCI organizations are not relying on formal programs to help community leaders become accomplished facilitators, they nonetheless recognize the need for training. At several sites, former volunteer community leaders have become full-time, paid staff and have gone through training to enhance their skills in their new roles. Some leaders who move to formal facilitator roles take staff positions with technical assistance providers. They help new leaders learn through supported experience, formal skill building, and/or transformational experiences.

Only a small percentage of leaders are interested in and skilled enough to become formal facilitators or trainers. Moreover, taking on such a formal role should not be seen as the pinnacle of leadership development or as a necessary component of a successful leadership development program at the community level. Becoming a facilitator or trainer is simply one pathway by which experienced leaders can further develop their capabilities.



The Practice of Leadership Development

Just as the *Paths to Leadership* model is a simplified framework for understanding the complex, organic process of leadership development, so, too, is it possible to create a framework for understanding the similarly complex and organic practice of leadership development in community building. In practice, a neighborhood in transformation requires more leaders with more sophisticated leadership skills than do neighborhood development or family service activities alone.

As a result, leadership development, when practiced in a neighborhood transformation process, needs to emphasize methods to produce many well-trained leaders. Some may think that leadership is created and nurtured through the process of planning and implementing neighborhood transformation itself — the “leaders are born not made” adage. Unfortunately, people who think this often are left waiting for charismatic leadership to emerge.

The RCI projects, on the other hand, demonstrate that it is possible to accelerate the emergence, growth, and efficacy of leaders deliberately. This is the process of leadership development, and the *Paths to Leadership* framework catalogs a number of effective approaches to this process. Nonetheless, the process of accelerating leadership development is organic: We cannot manufacture leaders nor force growth and development without sensitivity to natural rhythms. Leadership development in neighborhood transformation requires leaders to be open and flexible, always ready to adjust their approach in response to the ever-changing nature of communities.

Formal training sessions can be used to create a safe environment in which leaders can explore new behaviors and attitudes. A supportive, open training environment can help build relationships and the ability of individuals to work together as a team. Skills development and learning goals can be accomplished while collaboration and teamwork are strengthened.

Situational leadership

Among leadership theories, the one that is most applicable to neighborhood transformation is situational leadership. Situational leadership theory defines leadership as the capacity to assess a social or political situation and to select a leadership style that is most appropriate. In situational leadership, no one style is better than another; the style used is determined by the situation. Thus, developing strong situational leaders involves improving leaders' abilities to diagnose situations that come their way and select the appropriate response. Situational leadership assumes that everyone prefers certain leadership styles, but that everyone can learn to use other styles effectively, as well.

Situational leadership defines a style as the approach leaders choose to use within a group, both as their stance toward other participants and in their way of resolving conflicts. Some situations call for a confrontational style, others for collaboration.

In addition to differences in style, there are differences in methods. Methods are more specific than styles and refer to group techniques and leadership activities. A successful, mature leader masters a variety of leadership activities and group techniques. Methods are not as situation specific as styles, so a leader might use the same method with a variety of styles.

Applying situational leadership analysis to community-based organizations working to transform their neighborhoods can help explain the variety of leadership



personalities that have succeeded in leading these organizations. From the first attempt to analyze leadership types in community development organizations, researchers have been unable to identify any particular leadership style that elicits success. The RCI sites reflect different leadership styles among their executive directors, key community leaders, and RCI site coordinators. The sites also demonstrate how those leaders are capable of shifting style to meet new situations.

Building capacity

As stated earlier, neighborhoods in transition have a tremendous need for leaders to learn a variety of leadership skills. Efforts to build leadership capacity must be practical. They must meet people where they are, so that skills can be developed that respond to real needs, and strategies can be developed to address these needs. Leadership capacity building should be integrated into all of a community's programs and initiatives: workforce development efforts, commercial development strategies, youth development, school reform, and overall neighborhood revitalization.

In contrast to some other programs, the Rebuilding Communities Initiative demonstrates that the right time to invest in leadership development is at the outset — even at the earliest stages of planning. Further, the investment must be substantial and sustained because of the expanding need for leaders in various structures, and because of anticipated turnover among leaders over time.

RCI's three-phase model — plan, build capacity, and implement — has proven much more effective in nurturing leadership than has the traditional two-step plan and implement model. Often, capacity building is assumed, and neither time nor resources are devoted to it. Moreover, by requiring specific leadership development objectives, RCI highlighted the importance of systematically developing leaders for comprehensive community building. The RCI model also showed the efficacy of designing leadership development as part of a process with clear outcomes. Leadership development activities are not an end to themselves, but rather a tool to enhance neighborhood transformation and family development. Having the end in mind provides both direction and discipline to the leadership development investment.

It is impossible to overestimate the value of providing time for, and investing resources in, the process of building a collaborative. Small investments early on can prevent negative dynamics that take a lot of time, money, and political will to correct later. While leadership development was considered a component of the capacity-building phase of RCI, some important leadership development activity occurred during the earlier planning phase. This work often helped give participants the skills and opportunities they needed to confront potential problems.

Progress in both board development and developing broad participation in the community building process was most marked at RCI sites that employ a third-party facilitator. The most successful facilitators possessed highly refined group process skills as well as years of experience in community development and interagency collaboration.

Capacity building is not a substitute for actively recruiting people into the community building process. People with leadership potential need to be identified and brought into the process. Then, it is critical to assess participants and structure capacity building activities in ways that respond to any potential weaknesses. In building a strong, collaborative team, it is important to nurture trust, communication, and conflict-resolution skills among members





An organic process

The transformation of a neighborhood proceeds best as an unfolding, organic process. Planning is best understood and practiced as a continuous process, not as a one-time, up-front linear activity. Evaluation is best practiced as a continuous process of reflection and improvement, supported by strong data gathering and the perspectives of skilled outsiders, not as an after-the-fact, detached judgment by outsiders. The successful transformational organization is a learning organization, with its own methods of analyzing and formulating a theory of change, identifying and describing benchmarks of achievement and needed interventions, and assessing continually both the achievement of objectives and lessons learned. In practice, these functions may occur in a repeating cycle, but they often become simultaneous habits of a successful organization and its leaders. The actual process is more organic, more like an autonomous nervous system, constantly monitoring and adjusting itself.

Like others aspects of neighborhood transformation, leadership needs can be analyzed and categorized. Benchmarks can be set, and interventions identified. RCI, for example, helped identify and describe a set of tools and pathways for leadership development. Now the process of formally analyzing and planning interventions has begun.

Just as good leaders can decipher a situation and pull from their repertoire the most appropriate leadership style and methods, the good leadership development organization is able to draw from the five *Paths to Leadership Development* the most appropriate paths for the particular challenges at hand. Leadership development is so important to the success of neighborhood transformation that one critical capacity of the lead organization might be its ability to use the various paths of leadership development.

The most successful leadership development organizations are those that use all of the leadership pathways. RCI demonstrates that organizations can expand their capabilities in familiar paths at the same time they gradually acquire capabilities in other paths. The best organizations range over all five paths, combining them as needs change.

Lessons for Funders

The Rebuilding Communities Initiative has been successful in bringing people back into the community development process. Neighbors have been reunited with one another. Observing the strength and energy put forth by neighborhood leaders, other people are increasingly willing to get involved. People who have not been involved in any significant effort in the past are empowered through participating in this work to believe that they can make a difference in their communities. One reason for such success is that all participants — neighborhood leaders, public and private agency managers, community organization staff, and funders — found they had to adopt new ways of doing business.

Funders of community-based collaboratives focused on neighborhood transformations should be aware they are entering a complex, organic process that is unpredictable and time-consuming. For many funders, it is a process unlike any other they have experienced. Even funders experienced in the process have learned that each new commitment tests their organizational endurance and judgment.

Nurturing organic growth

The organic growth model described earlier means that funders need to find different ways of working. Compare helping a plant grow with helping a mechanical process expand. Expanding a mechanical process is predictable and is limited only by the availability of additional components. So a funder interested in expanding capacity need only provide the resources for acquiring additional components. Occasionally, funders may be asked to support reengineering the machine.

An organic process, in contrast, proceeds through its own cycles, at its own pace, with a series of refinements and adjustments. A gardener can spend money on interventions such as fertilizer and pest controls, but recognizes that these are mere aids and have their limits. The gardener understands the need to frequently apply these interventions and also to weed, prune, and harvest the crop. She must be responsive to changing conditions such as drought, new pests, and a cold snap. Funders following the agricultural model recognize that growth cannot be an immediate process. Neighborhood transformation and leadership development are organic processes. Therefore, funders need to be involved frequently, provide funding and other supports incrementally over a long period, and adjust expectations to the seasonal nature of growth.

The organic nature of the collaborative process holds three immediate consequences. Funders need to modify their funding techniques, allocate more staff time to supporting the collaborative, and orient trustees and other staff to the special nature of the collaborative process. In funding a collaborative, for example, it may be better to provide flexible levels of support on a flexible schedule as the collaborative process unfolds, identifying opportunities and leadership development needs. This approach is much different from the more common practice of awarding large grants for predetermined outcomes on a predetermined schedule.

Similarly, foundation staffing for neighborhood transformation requires more labor-intensive, field-level involvement than does conventional grant making. Funding neighborhood transformation requires foundation program officers with more specialized skills and training in the collaborative process. And foundation decision makers need to understand the organic nature of collaborative development and its consequences for funders, so that program officers' field participation is understood, and program officers are given the flexible authority they need.



Strategic goal setting in the collaborative model

Funders may have to adjust to a community collaborative's flexible goal- and strategy-setting processes. Successful collaboratives balance the need to achieve specific goals with the need to be flexible in the face of issues and opportunities that spring up as the collaborative pursues neighborhood transformation. The only way to achieve goals while remaining flexible is to make strategic decisions with all relevant stakeholders at the table. As stakeholders in the transformation process, funders must play an active role in discussions about setting strategies and choosing and revising goals.

When participating in these discussions, funders should be mindful of the lack of parity between themselves and their grantees. Funders should invite other participants to challenge the funder's deepest assumptions and beliefs, and renew this invitation often and with conviction. Participating in a collaborative requires foundation staff who possess refined community process skills and sensitivity to power issues.

As a collaborative selects goals, funders can help add needed structure to a flexible process by insisting on clear, realistic work plans to achieve the goals. Funders bring a unique outsider's perspective to the process and can help determine if work plans are realistic and proposed activities are likely to accomplish the selected goals.

Funders also should be aware that, given the organic nature of collaboratives, a collaborative's goals and opportunities may change over time even as its strategies remain intact. Again, this may challenge the traditional operating procedures of funders. Both program officers and senior foundation staff may need special orientation to prepare for such changes. Those who track progress against goals need some way to adjust those goals as the flexible process leads to changes.



Summary: Lessons for Funders

- Be aware that the neighborhood transformation process is organic, complex, unpredictable, and time-consuming.
- Provide supports incrementally over a long period of time, and adjust expectations to the seasonal nature of growth.
- Modify funding techniques, allocate more staff time to supporting the collaborative, orient trustees and other staff to the special nature of collaboratives.
- Play an active role in selecting strategies and setting goals, and be aware that these may change over time.
- Do not panic at the first sign of public opposition.





Anticipating local opposition

As has been documented repeatedly (see *Characteristics of Successful Neighborhood Development Organizations* by Neil Mayer and Jennifer Blake), no successful community-based organization is without detractors, and none has survived without weathering regular conflict. Conflict also may be inherent in more mainstream nonprofit agencies, but the open-governance characteristics of community-based operations mean opposition to them will likely be more apparent. The political nature of community-based operations almost demands such conflict. In Denver, for example, when RCI activity began, opposition surfaced from long-time critics of the lead organization. Other RCI sites reported experiencing similar, though less public, conflicts.

The major lesson here for funders is not to panic at the first sign of opposition. Funders who are unprepared to handle public criticism may attempt to abort a project or force a superficial reconciliation, which never prevent conflicts from surfacing again later, and may even jeopardize the project at a more advanced stage. As lead funder of RCI, the Casey Foundation was able to respond effectively to local opposition because it:

- fielded staff with enormous experience in community conflict;
- tapped sources of political intelligence about the local community;
- listened to opponents with a discerning ear without undermining the lead organization; and
- sustained the effort while helping the Foundation's senior management and board understand the conflict.

The Foundation's investments in each community's capacity building and leadership development efforts have been essential to the success of RCI. Allowing sufficient time for capacity building and leadership development to occur before implementation began was also crucial to the sites' successes. Three key points bear repeating:

- The three-phase model of RCI — plan, build capacity, and implement — proved much more effective in nurturing leadership than the traditional two-step plan and implement grant model.
- It is impossible to overestimate the value of investing time and resources in efforts to improve how a collaborative functions. Early investment saves more expensive remediation later.
- Investment in leadership development is a constant necessity in neighborhood transformation; it is not a one-time effort or expense.

Appendix: Background the Rebuilding Communities Initiative

Overview

The Rebuilding Communities Initiative is a seven-year comprehensive community building initiative that seeks to demonstrate how troubled, economically disenfranchised neighborhoods could be transformed into safe, supportive, and productive environments for children, youth and families. RCI marries the Foundation's system reform agenda with comprehensive community-building efforts in a select group of low-income distressed communities. The Foundation works in partnership with community-based organizations on comprehensive strategies to reverse social isolation and disinvestment in low-income neighborhoods. The RCI objectives are to achieve the following:

- Maximize capacity and impact of neighborhood resources and institutions
- Develop an effective neighborhood-based human service delivery system for children, youth and families
- Increase public and private capital investments in the neighborhood
- Improve physical and social infrastructure
- Strengthen the capacity and effectiveness of neighborhood governance collaboratives
- Increase resident participation in community building

The RCI theory of change states that reinvestment in social and economic infrastructure and political self-determination through collaborative neighborhood governance can contribute to the sustainable development of neighborhoods and improved life experiences for children and families.

RCI's Theory of Change is grounded in the following core beliefs:

- A blend of capacity development and systemic reforms at the government and neighborhood levels is needed to provide the opportunities and resources for community rebuilding that has viability, sustainability, and scale.
- Establishment of a viable neighborhood governance structure is essential as a place for emergence of community leadership around the rebuilding agenda, and as the target for gradual devolution to the neighborhood.
- Sustainability of community building depends largely on ownership of the change process by neighborhood groups working collaboratively with other public and private sector stakeholders – and on its responsiveness to neighborhood needs, priorities, and conditions.





Inherent in the theory of change is the need for leadership at all levels to advocate for changes that would improve the lives of the community's most vulnerable children, youth, and families. Community leaders – working separately and in coalition – can push for and achieve over time fundamental, long-term changes in agencies, institutions, and systems.

Following are thumbnail profiles of the participating sites and lead organizations in the Rebuilding Communities Initiative.

Boston

The Dudley Street Neighborhood Initiative (DSNI), established in 1984, evolved out of a community-initiated movement to address the effects of years of disinvestment in Boston's Roxbury/North Dorchester neighborhood and to protect the neighborhood from outside speculation. DSNI began as a collaborative of residents, local business people, social service agencies, and religious institutions interested in maintaining the character and affordability of the neighborhood and in improving the quality of life for neighborhood residents.

DSNI employs a community revitalization approach that recognizes the physical, human, and economic development needs of the community. It has coordinated several community-wide campaigns and planning initiatives. DSNI focuses on community organizing around neighborhood issues such as identifying and removing environmental hazards; controlling and revitalizing vacant land; and implementing community-directed plans for facilities, community, human, and economic development.

Prior to being selected for RCI, DSNI had extensive experience with outreach and community organizing, but very little experience with human service systems reform or use of management information systems.

Denver

Founded in 1973, NEWSED Community Development Corporation is a community-based organization that focuses on economic development and increasing investment in Denver's Westside neighborhood. NEWSED's mission is to promote and develop economic and community programs and projects that raise the levels of income, education, and political awareness among neighborhood residents. It has pursued initiatives and programs aimed at solving longer-term economic problems in the community through job creation, developing needed shopping areas and services, fostering minority business ownership, and providing employment and training services.

Before RCI, NEWSED had minimal involvement in outreach and community organizing or in human services. It also had minimal experience with management information systems and the use of data.

Detroit

Warren/Conner Development Coalition (WCDC), which incorporated in 1984, evolved from a group of community leaders, residents, and business people from Detroit's Eastside who were interested in revitalizing their community. WCDC plays several roles in the Eastside community: coalition agent, advocate and organizer, identifier of resources, convener of forums for discussion, debater and planner, community educator, sponsor and coordinator of programs, commercial real estate developer, and leadership developer and trainer.

WCDC's philosophy is to develop systemic solutions that address community problems holistically, and offer long-term potential for changing the neighborhood's political dynamics. Prior to RCI, WCDC had extensive involvement in outreach and community organizing, but limited involvement with human services, management information systems, and data use.

Philadelphia

Germantown Settlement was formed in 1884 as a multipurpose human service agency. It has a history of working with other organizations and institutions to provide services to the community. Among the array of human services the Settlement provides are job counseling and placement for area youth; case management services for families with children; family and individual counseling; education/training and case management services for adjudicated youth; and preventive health, education, and advocacy for children of low-income families.

The Settlement's development subsidiary, Greater Germantown Housing Development Corporation, provides housing and housing counseling, and implements commercial and economic development programs. Through a partnership with its community-organizing subsidiary, Wister Neighborhood Council, the Settlement helps residents to organize and plan around crime prevention, community development, zoning and land-use, block leadership, and community problem solving.

Prior to its selection for RCI, the Settlement had extensive involvement in community outreach and organizing, and human services, but limited experience with management information systems and data use.

Washington, D.C.

Marshall Heights Community Development Organization (MHCDO) was organized in 1979 by a group of neighborhood residents as a forum for citizens to express concerns about housing and community development and to facilitate interaction with the D.C. government. MHCDO is now a multifaceted community development corporation that focuses on addressing the educational, economic, social, cultural, and physical development needs of its community. Its primary accomplishments have been in economic and commercial development.

MHCDO's approach to community building involves development and implementation of programs focussed on employment, training, and job development; partnerships with neighborhood schools; adult education; crisis intervention; housing and credit counseling; substance abuse prevention and treatment; low- and moderate-income housing development; and commercial and economic revitalization and development.

Prior to joining RCI, MHCDO had limited experience with community organizing and outreach, human services, management information systems, or data use.

