ADDRESSING CHALLENGES IN COMMUNITY-BASED SERVICE COORDINATION

Breaking Down Silos to Promote Economic Opportunity

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THIS BRIEF is the second in a series documenting the implementation of an economic mobility initiative by New York City's Change Capital Fund (CCF). CCF is a consortium of New York City donors formed to invest in local nonprofits that undertake data-driven antipoverty strategies integrating housing, education, and employment services. In response to the constraints of customary funding, CCF embraces a "cross-sector," holistic approach to better serve community residents.

This series highlights issues for practitioners and funders involved with comprehensive community initiatives. The first brief, *The Promise of a Community-Based Approach to Economic Opportunity*, described CCF in detail; introduced the initiative's five grantees, located in Brooklyn and the Bronx (see Table 1 below); and shared the organizations' ambitious work plans and start-up efforts.[1] This second brief describes two pervasive challenges to service coordination and the ways grantees have responded to them.[2]

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1   Aurelia De La Rosa Aceves and David M. Greenberg, *The Promise of a Community-Based Approach to Economic Opportunity*: New York City's Change Capital Fund (New York: MDRC, 2015).

2   This brief is based on 27 interviews with staff members at different levels of all five CCF grantees (New Settlement Apartments, St. Nicks Alliance, Fifth Avenue Committee, Community Solutions/Brownsville Partnership, and Cypress Hills Local Development Corporation), conducted between November 2015 and February 2016.

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TABLE 1

CHANGE CAPITAL FUND GRANTEES AND INTERVENTIONS

GRANTEE	INTERVENTION
St. Nicks Alliance	**NABE 3.0 Initiative** integrates St. Nicks Alliance's outcomes-driven strategies in housing, employment, and education through one-on-one "coaching" to individuals and their households. **Priority area: 11206 zip code (Williamsburg, Brooklyn)**
Fifth Avenue Committee (FAC)	**Stronger Together** (FAC in partnership with Brooklyn Workforce Innovations, Red Hook Initiative, and Southwest Brooklyn Industrial Development Corporation) is helping local, low-income public housing residents gain access to adult education, support services, and job training and employment opportunities. **Priority area: New York City Housing Authority's Red Hook and Gowanus developments in Brooklyn**
Cypress Hills Local Development Corporation (CHLDC)	CHLDC is using real estate development strategies to increase affordable housing and to create quality manufacturing jobs while offering neighborhood students a continuum of educational services that starts with school readiness and continues through college. **Priority area: Cypress Hills/East New York, Brooklyn**
Community Solutions/ Brownsville Partnership	**5,000 Jobs Campaign** (led by the Brownsville Partnership with a coalition of partners) aims to improve the user experience and outcomes within the existing workforce development system and in turn connect 5,000 Brownsville residents to jobs by the end of 2018. **Priority area: Brownsville, Brooklyn**
New Settlement Apartments (NSA)	NSA is improving the coordination among and efficacy of its affordable housing organizing, its Community School model, its College Access and Success Center efforts, and its young adult employment services in order to ensure greater continuity and intensity of program participation. **Priority area: Mount Eden neighborhood of the Bronx**

One of the theories informing CCF is that **community organizations are well positioned to coordinate multiple services to underserved low-income populations, but they often do not receive funding to build their capacity to execute coordinated work**. Instead, traditional funding streams typically support a single program or service, which can encourage organizations, or programs within a multiservice organization, to specialize and take a more narrow approach to their work — resulting in "silos" instead of a joint effort. CCF departs from this practice, because its donors believe that *an integrated approach to service delivery is an important way to "saturate" areas of persistent poverty with intensive, comprehensive services, cultivating multiple pathways toward neighborhood-level change.* To this end, CCF has devoted resources not just to funding individual programs but also to helping groups develop their capability to coordinate work to meet the multiple, overlapping needs of low-income families. CCF does this in two ways: (1) by supporting multiservice organizations to break down internal silos, and (2) by supporting organizations in their effort to form partnerships in order to offer more comprehensive services to their communities.

DEVELOPING A RATIONALE FOR SERVICE COORDINATION

CCF operates under the theory that "silo-busting," or coordination among organizational programs engaged in different types of services, can produce better results. For example, if an academic support program learns that a young person is not fully engaged in school because her family is being evicted from their apartment, referral to a partner agency that can quickly stabilize their housing may also help her succeed academically. But programs have a natural tendency to operate independently, and it is not always clear how one program's services can add value to another's. Moreover, the time and energy required to coordinate services may distract from core competencies. In an effort to overcome these challenges, *CCF grantees have created unifying rationales for coordination across their organizations' programs that may be sustained over time.*

CHALLENGE

To address the tendency of community organizations and programs within a multiservice organization to operate in silos.

GRANTEE RESPONSE

Develop a compelling and unifying rationale for service coordination that is rooted in the lives and needs of the people whom the programs or organizations serve.

For example, before the CCF initiative, **New Settlement Apartments** was operating 12 different programs that largely functioned independently. Since then, New Settlement has embarked on an organization-wide "theory of change" process, in which senior staff members from the programs have come together to define the organization's overarching goals for the people they serve and to determine how the different programs' service strategies

contribute to those goals. Over a two-year span, ongoing conversations have resulted in New Settlement creating its mission and vision statements, developing a website for the whole organization, identifying synergies among its programs that allow them to support each other's work, and implementing a new-hire orientation process for the organization as a whole, rather than each program conducting its own. Similarly, **St. Nicks Alliance's NABE 3.0** plan has provided a rationale and a system for coordination among workforce, education, and housing programs based on where a resident lives; before the CCF initiative, families may have interacted with only one program, even if they could have been well served by others. **Cypress Hills Local Development Corporation** is building coordination efforts from its recent agency-wide strategic planning processes, and **Stronger Together**, a partnership of organizations, is working from an extensive business plan that recognizes the resource constraints inherent in an arrangement that asks staff members to dedicate time and effort beyond the scope of their regular duties. **Community Solutions/Brownsville Partnership** is motivated by the recognition that solving unemployment in Brownsville will require neighborhood, city, and state agencies to come together to streamline employment services. Using a process improvement framework allows the organization to invite various agencies to participate in identifying and removing inefficiencies and roadblocks.

At the same time, a unifying rationale for coordination can be challenging to develop, even when staff are committed to creating one. As one staff member reflected:

> Every program and division has their lens. [Agreeing on a unifying rationale across programs is] challenging and scary for people. For example, a program works on education, but you're told the real outcome is employment. … You're saying that all the work that I do is to another end. … There's no way to make these conversations easy.

Planning processes may involve different ideologies or theories of practice. As one staff member said, "Are we a service organization? A social justice organization? What are the problems we are trying to solve?" They can also involve internal or external competition for staff or financial resources, an issue especially important in organizations that have multiple divisions with overlapping priority populations — for example, a consortium such as Stronger Together, which works with an array of staff capacities, funding streams, and service orientations. For these reasons, developing a unifying rationale can be a delicate process, but it is an essential one. As one staff member said, "You cannot bypass the logic model phase, or else you will build something that constantly needs reconfiguration." He went on to provide an example of the importance of organizing the theory behind

an overarching goal, in relation to the need to streamline data collection across the agency.

> We have so many different [database] users and so many different needs … so we wanted to build a program … so that all that information is stored in one central platform. What we did was approach all program staff, and asked what information their program is collecting, what their program delivery is like, and what their reporting requirements are. … [The logic model let us] streamline all those service delivery goals into one organizational mission.

By using these types of planning processes, CCF grantees are breaking down program silos and equipping their staffs with more resources to meet the needs of those they serve. As a result, staff members are connecting to their work in a more deeply motivating way. One said, "My job feels more meaningful — not just feels, but it *is* more meaningful. A kid is not going to do well academically if they are going to lose their home." Another staff member described one benefit of coordination (in addition to better internal referral processes) to be a deeper connection to an agency-wide mission: "We're looking at [the work] through an organizational perspective. It's not a 'siloed' perspective. Workforce is a component, housing is a component, and the outcomes are reflective of an [overall] organizational capacity."

RETHINKING APPROACHES TO COORDINATION

Coordination can happen in different ways. CCF grantees have developed distinct approaches to coordinating services, based on what they consider to be appropriate for their communities and organizational strengths. These models include the following:

CHALLENGE

To (re)define what constitutes coordination.

GRANTEE RESPONSE

Be open to multiple, simultaneous approaches that emphasize both formal and informal coordination.

- ■ **DELIVERING SERVICES TO A SINGLE POPULATION ALONG A CONTINUUM.** For example, **Stronger Together** is developing a pathway for young people and adults in two large public housing developments, Red Hook and Gowanus Houses, to engage in educational and job training opportunities that ultimately lead to job placement. This involves resident outreach through the Red Hook Initiative; adult education and job readiness through the Fifth Avenue Committee; advanced, sectoral training through Brooklyn Workforce Innovations; and placement in industrial and manufacturing jobs through Southwest Brooklyn Industrial Development Corporation.

■ **DELIVERING SERVICES MEANT TO BENEFIT DIFFERENT POPULATIONS "FROM CRADLE TO CAREER." Cypress Hills Local Development Corporation** emphasizes the needs of neighborhood residents over the course of a lifetime. This involves school readiness (focusing on early childhood outcomes through the organization's Promise Neighborhoods efforts), kindergarten through twelfth-grade education programs and after-school services (including High School Choice support services and summer camp programming), college access and success programs, employment services, and programs focused on health, affordable housing, community development, and organizing around community issues important to residents. Yet while offering comprehensive services to community residents represents a kind of coordination, an individual or family may not fully experience the benefits, at least until data-sharing systems are developed for use across the many divisions and sites of the agency.

■ **DELIVERING CONCURRENT SERVICES TO AN ENTIRE HOUSEHOLD. St. Nicks Alliance** is emphasizing coordination across its workforce, education services, and housing departments to meet the needs of parents and children simultaneously. Efforts are especially focused on the families of a group of about 50 children who receive intensive services from a "transformational coach," a position created to support CCF coordination activities.

■ **COORDINATING THE WORK OF DIFFERENT SYSTEMS TO BENEFIT NEIGHBORHOOD RESIDENTS. Community Solutions** is using a process improvement framework, by which the staff examines the system for addressing workforce issues in Brownsville and identifies areas for improvement. By better aligning the efforts of different city and state agencies, including the New York City Housing Authority, the city's Department of Small Business Services (which operates the city's workforce centers), and New York State's Department of Labor, while also incorporating the work of smaller, more targeted nonprofit employment services providers, the goal is to increase the persistence and success of Brownsville residents in workforce programs.

Not only do these approaches represent distinct models, but organizations also have options about how formally or informally to pursue opportunities for service coordination. *Given the fact that informal coordination may open opportunities for more formal coordination, CCF grantees have found it helpful to emphasize both approaches.* It may take some deliberate effort to recognize these opportunities for occasional or one-time coordination across programs, but these may lead to more regular and routine efforts down the road.

Formal efforts at coordination have involved shared clients and data systems, case conferences among different divisions about service participants, and regular referral processes between agency programs. **St. Nicks Alliance** included workforce development staff members in parent meetings connected with their youth programming, in case parents had employment needs; **Stronger Together** developed a database to share among organizations, and the agencies conducted orientations at each other's programs to encourage referrals; and partners in the 5,000 Jobs Campaign have agreed to give **Community Solutions** performance data that will help detail the employment-related outcomes of Brownsville residents.

While it is resource-intensive and time consuming to build shared data systems, even informal data-sharing can be particularly effective in promoting better-coordinated service delivery, especially as opportunities appear at program intake. For example, a health navigator charged with facilitating access to Affordable Care Act benefits at **Cypress Hills Local Development Corporation** helped incorporate questions about insurance status into the intake process for a variety of CHLDC programs. She then granted staff members access to her calendar, so when an insurance need was identified, an appointment could be set up on the spot. In another case of informal coordination, because of fears about displacement occurring in their neighborhood, CHLDC's community organizing division worked to develop a survey for families who participated in CHLDC's after-school programs in order to learn about housing challenges. The survey found that 19 families (or 13 percent of respondents) were behind on rent or their mortgage, which prompted CHLDC to connect the families to divisions that could help them manage their housing and financial challenges. And **New Settlement Apartments** established an organization-wide outreach group that meets on occasion and communicates over email so staff members can better manage the time they spend working weekends at outreach fairs and community events.

LOOKING FORWARD

As the CCF grantees continue to navigate coordination challenges, MDRC will document their progress. The next brief in this series, to be released later in 2016, will explore how coordinated service delivery in the CCF initiative has affected the number of people served and other outcomes for low-income residents. ■

Read more about MDRC's approach to the evaluation

Learn more about CCF and the grantees

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