

PEER NETWORKING AND PLACE-BASED INITIATIVES



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Place-based initiatives - foundation or government funded programs for community change which concentrate their resources and activities on particular neighborhoods or cities - have been a subject of considerable attention (particularly among foundation funders) since the 1990s, with varied results (Kubisch et al. ,2010; Brown, Columbo & Hughes, 2009). Some initiatives, despite many complex challenges, have had real impact on the communities in which they operate (they often are also called Comprehensive Community Initiatives). Others have fallen short of their original goals - often as measured by the funders that created them, through external evaluations the funders commissioned. The opportunity to learn arises from both successful and troubled initiatives.

Many of these initiatives have used peer networking to involve people from throughout the community in the initiatives' development and operation. Peer networking is a problem-solving and decision-making approach built on interaction, both structured and informal, among a group of people defined as "equals" by their common goals or interests, similar job roles, or places in a community. Peer networking involves these people exchanging information, disseminating good practices and building leadership skills, to achieve some commonly-valued purpose, such as community change (Rogers, 2003; Rhodes, Stokes & Hampton, 2004; Bailey, 2005; Backer, Smith & Barbell, 2005).

Peers may have work or community roles in common (groups of local residents, hospital medical directors, community services workers, etc.), or they may share primarily an interest in and commitment to a particular arena of community change, such as improving children's health. Networking may include both in-person and electronic means of bringing people together in a shared space to support the initiative. It may help them access information and resources, communicate about issues of common concern, and problem-solve in ways that contribute to individual objectives as well as to the larger goal of community change.

The Monitor Institute's in-process document *A Funder's Guide to Networks* (2010) identifies five things "networks are good for"- to weave community, to access many and new perspectives, to build and share knowledge, to mobilize people, and to coordinate resources and action. To those can be added a sixth, discussed in this study - to provide psychological support to network members as they engage in the difficult challenges involved in creating community change. Experiences with these peer networks also provide many opportunities for learning - these activities have much in common with learning organizations (Senge, 1990) and Communities of Practice (Wenger, McDermott & Snyder, 2002).

Launched in 2009, The California Endowment's (TCE) Building Healthy Communities (BHC) is a 10-year, \$250 million place-based initiative that supports 14 California communities in creating an environment where children and youth are healthy, safe and ready to learn. BHC aims at achieving four "big results" in each community - providing a health home for all children, increasing school attendance, reversing the childhood obesity epidemic and reducing youth violence. Ten more specific health and wellness outcomes also have been identified.

For the 14 communities, all of which struggle with limited resources and other challenges, getting to these results will not be easy. Each community was selected to participate in BHC partly because they show promise for mobilizing residents, youth and community leaders to join together on this difficult set of tasks. Success requires this diverse body of people to work together effectively over a long period of time. A key way to facilitate that is to create in each site a peer network that provides a space for communications, resource-sharing and problem-solving.

For the 14 BHC sites, the peer network in each community is called a "Hub," and from it will branch many spokes aimed at promoting the community change to which BHC is addressed. A local organization will be given a grant to

coordinate each Hub, and the Hubs in turn will relate to the community organizations responsible for the BHC project, as well to TCE and the community at large.

This thought paper brings together both findings from research and the wisdom of experience about peer networking, as this process has been used by other place-based initiatives in both the foundation and government worlds. The paper has two main objectives:

1 - Present lessons learned from recent foundation and government peer networking and place-based initiatives

2 - Synthesize these lessons into strategies The California Endowment might use as it shapes the Building Healthy Communities initiative, and which can be used by BHC community sites

Although the focus is on peer networking, some context is provided in the paper about the larger topic of place-based initiatives. There is a brief analysis of the current state of philanthropic efforts in this area, as well as of recent place-based initiatives launched by the Federal government.

Learning from both sets of activities is possible, even though some of these initiatives did not explicitly use peer networking as a major aspect of their intervention in communities. However, all the initiatives studied made some effort to involve community stakeholders in defining and implementing the community change work, and to that extent their experiences are relevant to understanding and implementing peer networking.

Thus, some of the thought paper's content is organized around what's worked and what hasn't in major place-based initiative approaches, particularly as related to getting communities involved through peer networking. Many of these are efforts funded by foundations. In the last several years, however, several

Federal agencies funding community change work for youth and for various disadvantaged populations also have been implementing place-based approaches - sometimes in a major departure from previous grantmaking strategies. Their experiences with peer networking and place-based initiatives also will figure into this analysis.

The thought paper isn't intended to be a literature review, though some publications about peer networking and place-based initiatives will be cited. Much of what follows came from 47 interviews with foundation, nonprofit and academic thought leaders, all of them actively involved in doing peer networking, funding it, or studying it. Appendix A lists the interviewees and Appendix B the questions asked of them.

The paper also draws heavily from two recent studies conducted by the Human Interaction Research Institute (Backer, 2008, 2009). These studies explore the process and outcomes of 19 peer networking activities for which the Annie E. Casey Foundation is a funder, a participant or both.

The paper ends with a set of recommendations intended for consideration by the Endowment about how it can further develop the Hub and BHC's overall response to the challenges of place-based initiatives. These recommendations may be useful for shaping implementation of the individual BHC sites as well.

Out of the interviews and exploration of the knowledge base just summarized has emerged a way of thinking about peer networking, summarized here as the “Peer Networking and Community Change Grid.” The Grid provides a straightforward organizing device for the rest of the paper, which has a separate section devoted to each of its elements.

PEER NETWORKING AND COMMUNITY CHANGE GRID	
Community Change	Ultimate Outcome
Learning • Capacity Building • Infrastructure	Immediate Outcomes
Good Practices • Challenges	Strategies
Communication • Space • Resources Problem-Solving	Foundation
Trust • Time • Truth	Bedrock

At the **bedrock** level of the Grid are three enduring qualities of successful peer networks, reaffirmed time and time again in both research and community experience - including many mentions by the interviewees for this study. “Trust, Time and Truth” are the firm ground on which all good peer networking ultimately rests. They are qualities that permeate both the philosophy and actual operations of effective peer networking.

The built **foundation** level above this bedrock are the core components of peer networking. First is a communication system that includes in-person and electronic aspects (and the latter include those conducted in real-time, such as telephone conference calls; and those conducted virtually, such as e-mail exchanges or Twitter messages). Peer networking uses those types of communications tools collectively to create a space (physical, electronic, and usually both) in which network members can interact. Operation of the networking activities includes a range of information, human and financial resources needed to support the peer network. And successful peer networking includes the architecture

for a problem-solving process that engages the network members, both for the community as a whole and for the organizations they represent.

Achieving success with the network can be facilitated both by using good practices that other peer networking activities have found helpful, and by responding to challenges that appear regularly for such activities. The two sets of **strategies** presented here were first identified in research done for the two HIRI studies for the Casey Foundation, and they are presented intact here, enlivened by learnings from interviews conducted for this study.

The Grid also identifies the **immediate outcomes** of peer networking - (1) learning (individually, by peer network members and others involved in the community change effort, and organizationally, by the peer networking coordinating group and other organizations involved in the network); (2) capacity-building (for the peer network and for the organizations involved in the work of community change); and (3) development of an effective infrastructure for operating the network and maintaining it over time.

Finally, all of these levels below are focused on one **ultimate outcome** - making community change happen. The specific ultimate outcome typically is identified by the funder, and according to those interviewed, needs to be tightly circumscribed if the change effort is to be both successful (goals too broad tend to dissipate energies) and measurable (sometimes community-level goals are so lofty they cannot be readily assessed, so it isn't possible to learn whether impact was achieved).

No pretense is made here that the Grid is the only way to categorize the nature, process and outcomes of peer networking. It is the one that emerged fairly readily from the interviews and literature review for this study, and it provides a way to organize the material presented here. Among the alternatives, the Monitor Institute's **A Funder's Guide to Networks** (2010) has a similar but not entirely parallel structure.

This section of the thought paper presents lessons learned about each of the Grid's elements, derived from the interviews and other data sources discussed above.

Bedrock: Three Enduring Qualities of Effective Peer Networking

Qualities of successful peer networking mentioned almost universally by those who've engaged in it come down to three fundamental aspects:

1 - Trust - networks are successful if they create a trusting environment for the participants, in which they feel safe saying what they think and having an honest discussion with other network members.

There are many ways to create that trust level, but all of them take both time and effort. Creating trust involves some action-taking by funders, but as often, our interviewees said, trust-building requires funders to set ground rules, make commitments, and then stand back while network members from the community take stock of them, and slowly come to have trust in both the efficacy of the network and of the safe harbor it provides for sharing.

Especially in the early stages of a network, community members tend to "test" funders in various ways to see if they will stick to the standards and commitments they've set forth, e.g., for allowing the peer network to choose its own goals and operating methods. While funders may feel it necessary to make changes if they see major problems (e.g., lack of action, or what they regard as poor choices by network members), there can be a heavy cost involved in terms of loss of trust, which in turn may make network members less likely to participate. So any significant changes need to be weighed very carefully, and made in consultation with community leaders to frame them properly and build support for the changes made.

LESSONS LEARNED

Several interviewees also cautioned funders that, as interviewee Karl Stauber put it, “money doesn’t buy trust” - just giving out grants isn’t enough. Trust has to be earned through direct observation of how a funder’s words translate into action over a period of time. The safe space created for peer networking has to be proven truly confidential and non-judgmental in its operation, for example.

Moreover, the assumption needs to be made that problems in communication and even occasional violations of trust among the peer networking members will happen, despite all well-intentioned efforts to the contrary. A process needs to be set in place, in advance, for how to deal with those violations. Having a swift process for setting the conditions of trust back in place, our interviewees said, is of great importance.

Sometimes problems with trust arise as a by-product of success. For instance, a funder may have considerable success initially with a peer networking process, and perhaps with the place-based initiative of which it is a part. If that success leads to a judgment, however well-intentioned, that some of the agreed-to processes for peer networking can be abbreviated or even dispensed with, the results can be extremely negative in terms of future trust.

So can changes in direction, particularly if brought about not by observable changes in external circumstances, but by changes in funder leadership or from consultants brought in to examine the process and recommend improvements. Several interviewees reported stories of breakdowns in trust that occurred in part because peer network members and other community leaders, rightly or wrongly, saw changes they didn’t like happening as a result of interventions by outside consultants.

Providing psychological support through the networking process for participants in a network can be particularly important to the network’s success - and helps to build trust. As discussed further below, research on peer networks shows that part of the value they offer is support from other peers not only for

the sometimes difficult process of networking to address a particular community change goal, but also for meeting the challenges within their own organizations. Interviewees commented that support from peer networks has been particularly valuable over the last two years due to the recession. Interviewee Joan Twiss said: “peer networking gives support when times are tough, and gives validation to the work.”

Funders can't do much to provide psychological support directly, but they can help to set up the peer network so that such support is encouraged. In particular, the “ground rules” for the network can be structured so that giving “air time” to opportunities for support is part of the culture of the peer network.

2 - Time - networks are successful if they allow for sufficient time for the peer networking activities to develop and mature.

Intertwined with the development of trust is the common expression “trust takes time.” It is important that peer networking participants, the entities coordinating a network, and funders all accept that good peer networking, like good place-based initiatives, takes a long time to develop.

This may be challenging, because as interviewee Robert Chaskin observed, “to a large extent, this kind of networking activity and the efforts to manage them take place on the margins.” Everyone involved is already over-committed, and while funding for good coordinating activities helps, peer networking almost by definition is a marginal activity even when it supports the core work of an organization or the goals of a community. It is process, not content, and that increases the difficulty of “finding time” to do peer networking. Time becomes an important commodity that must be allocated generously for a network to be successful.

Time also is required because networks are not static enterprises. In related work on community coalitions, Butterfoss and Kegler's Community Coalition

Action Theory (Butterfoss, 2007) emphasizes that most coalitions repeatedly go through the three primary stages of forming, continuing and making the coalition a regular part of the community. Changes in the community, in group leadership, or in the nature of the community problem to be addressed can make necessary changes in a peer networking or coalition activity, and if that happens the passage of time may be needed to re-stabilize the activity.

3 - Truth - networks are successful if they are transparent in their operation, and if they gather and offer ready access to accurate data about their operations and impact.

The “truth” factor takes two forms in peer networking: (1) promoting **transparency** in the peer network’s operations, which is again intertwined with trust; and (2) availability of **evaluation data** to inform good decision-making about the network, used both to improve process and justify the time and money investments made in peer networks.

Transparency means that the rules and procedures by which the peer networking activity operates are available to all, ideally including anyone in the community where the network exists. This can be done simply, e.g., by posting them on a website. Such statements, of course, need to be fully vetted by the peer network membership and agreed to.

It also means that the content arising from peer networking activities needs to be readily accessible to its members. And it means simultaneously that the rules for protecting content and keeping the network confidential are clear and readily available. Building and maintaining trust typically requires that at least some of what is discussed or presented at networking events (meetings, electronic real time or virtual interactions, etc.) be kept confidential, but the ground rules by which that happens should also be publicly posted, e.g., on a website.

LESSONS LEARNED

In some instances, where peer network members hold jobs with high profiles and many legal complications, almost all content needs to be held confidential. In other cases, much of the content may need to be publicly accessible, since the network is supporting a community project, but some portions may still need to be protected.

Peer networking is a complicated activity, and gathering **evaluation data** about how well the process is working can be very helpful to the network members in improving that process over time. Data about how and how well the peer networking activity is working also can be used to provide justification to funders, community leaders or policymakers, etc. about the investment made in this activity. As already mentioned, peer networking is a “marginal” activity in most communities, and especially during tight economic times some in the community may look on it as dispensable. Such reactions are all the more likely if the network is known to be costly. Data showing the practical payoff in real community outcomes from the time and money investment made in peer networking can help to offset such thinking.

Moreover, gathering data can contribute to documenting the overall process of peer networking, which can help to grow the field. Despite some documenting efforts in recent years, such as the Monitor Institute’s project and the two HIRI studies for Annie E. Casey Foundation, there is much about peer networking that may be known to those doing the work on the ground from their own individual experiences, but comparisons among networks and broader sharing of what’s known about this complex social process are not common.

HIRI’s second study, completed in 2010, reviewed what is known about the impact of Casey’s 19 peer networking activities. This study found that only five of them had significant evaluation data, though some anecdotal information about impact was available for many of the others. So there is room for improvement even with one of the most systematic and large investments made in peer networking in the philanthropic community. To improve practice and help build the

field of peer networking, several of our interviewees said, much more documenting and compilation is needed. For the documenting process, **evaluation instruments** that help to measure process and outcomes of peer networking can be quite helpful. Related instruments for evaluating community coalitions and collaborations were identified by Backer (2003) and include online as well as on-paper response approaches. Some of these could be reviewed to determine their potential for evaluating peer networks as well.

Two evaluation instruments which were conceived specifically for peer networks are:

* Monitor Institute's **Survey: Network Effectiveness: Diagnostic and Development Tool**, which assesses the health of a network and actions that could be taken to further develop or strengthen it. It is a simple, three-page rating form that gathers basic information on the following elements: (1) value of the network to participants, (2) strategies for participation, (3) form of the network, (4) leadership of the network, (5) governance of the network, (6) connection by space and communication strategies, (7) capacity of the network (financial sustainability, resources to do its work), and (7) learning and adaptation style. Along with each rating category, the form cites some actions that could be taken to strengthen the network in that area (available through Monitor Institute, www.monitor.com).

* Cause Communication's **Network Health Scorecard** was developed for the W.K. Kellogg Foundation's Rural People Rural Politics program. Developed in collaboration with Network Impact, this straightforward instrument is focused on the question: "How do we know we're doing right and how can we improve?" It gathers information on the following elements: (1) network purpose, (2) network performance, (3) network operations and (4) network capacity (available through Cause Communications, www.causecommunications.org).

Evaluations of other networks have identified additional tools and concepts that could be gathered together and appraised for possible application to the BHC peer networking activities. Results could be shared with peer networking leadership at the 14 sites through an in-person or on-line learning session, and decisions made about adopting a single form that could be used by the Hubs at each site to gather data useful for program improvement and program justification. Use of a single form that all could agree to would make it possible to compare results across sites, and to build more general recommendations for improvement of the entire BHC peer networking effort.

Foundation: Four Core Elements of Effective Peer Networking

Peer networks essentially bring people together for periodic interactions on a topic of mutual interest. Peers usually are people who don't work together in the same organization, and who may ordinarily be separated from immediate contact even though they live in the same neighborhood or city (though some may also be in touch through collaborative activities or even other peer networks!). Bringing people together requires the use of various **communication** media, and through them the creation of a **space**, like a town plaza, in which they can interact.

The psychological presence of that common space is important to creating the positive habit of interaction for the peer network. Many such activities in the past have not been successful simply because participants never got in the habit of "coming to the town square" for regular interaction. Our interviewees commented on the importance of defining the town square clearly, so that all understand what it is (for example, if the main peer networking vehicle changes, such as moving routine communications to Google Wave or another technology platform, network participants need to agree to that and get educated on how to do it). Whether funded or unfunded, peer networking activities require **resources** (information, human and financial). In the case of informal, unfunded networks, the resources are donated by participants. TCE is financially support-

ing the BHC Hubs, but inevitably peer network members also will be donating resources - information about local activities, their time as participants, etc.

Finally, peer networking is of interest to participants partly because it provides a means for them to solve problems more effectively and systematically than they could without the network's existence. For efficiency in that process, some sort of **problem-solving** infrastructure needs to be set up. Sometimes, our interviewees said, that infrastructure is extremely informal, such as having a problem-solving item on the agenda for each network meeting. At other times, the problem-solving mechanism takes a more rigorous form, such as a listserv that can be used for gathering input on a problem identified by a network member, "curated" by the network coordinator so that there is a permanent record that may be used for other purposes (including evaluation).

1 - Communication

All peer networking activities include a communication system that weaves together multiple channels for the members to interact with each other. Almost always, an in-person component is a fundamental part of this system. Time and again, both research and practical experience have confirmed that, as interviewee Deborah Naughton put it, "there is no substitute for human interaction." In many cases, the electronic elements are stand-ins for in-person methods like meetings and conferences - because money or time constraints prevent direct interaction. Face-to-face interactions are particularly critical in the early stages of a peer networking activity, when trust is being developed.

People who've "breathed the same air" at least once can have a more successful relationship through conference calls, e-mails, etc., according to several interviewees. But this landscape is shifting. Now many people prefer that many or even most of their communications happen by electronic means - telephone conference calls and other interactions that happen in real time; and virtual interactions, such as e-mail exchanges or Twitter messages. The younger the

participant, the more likely is this preference. The key, our interviewees told us, is to create a system that works for the particular group of people who make up the peer network. That requires an extended conversation about what methods people want to use for the network's operation, how to deal with conflicting preferences, and how to periodically revisit the "communications mix" to refine it as necessary depending on changing internal or external needs.

Face to face approaches also can include peer matching, which offers a more highly guided and comprehensive way to communicate. Often facilitated by a third-party "matchmaker," this process involves identifying two projects (in this case, two BHC sites, or two organizations within a single peer network) with a similar need or interest, and promoting a set of in-person or electronic communications among them about the subject of interest. In some cases, that may include a site visit from one project to another, so that direct observation can occur and an extended dialogue can happen.

Annie E. Casey Foundation's Technical Assistance Resource Center (TARC) peer matching system for its Making Connections place-based initiative is one of the most sophisticated and has been in successful operation for some years (Backer, 2008). It uses a highly-structured approach, including an initial assessment to determine if there is a good "fit" for the match being contemplated between two sites, and co-design of the intervention by the participants. The TARC system has been the subject of a multi-year evaluation, generally showing positive results - in one evaluation, 100% of participants were satisfied with their participation. A cautionary note is that the process TARC uses is somewhat cumbersome and expensive, so not everyone is interested in participating and adequate resources must be set aside to fund those who do choose to do peer networking in this more comprehensive way.

Another aspect of the communication system used for peer networking is sensitivity to the language spoken by participants. Across the 14 sites in California, peer networking participants may have a number of language backgrounds.

Spanish is the most likely alternative to English. Most of the peer networking activities reviewed for this study were conducted only in English, however, and some interviewees made the point that many participants are bi-lingual so that they can participate in English even if their first language is not that. The simplicity and cost savings inherent in an English-only system are obvious.

On the other hand, for groups that come from diverse grassroots communities, that may not be true, and the fastest way to discover effective ways to deal with language challenges is to ask participants how they should be handled. Options might range from traditional (e.g., translators) to innovative (e.g., use of technology like handheld translation devices). Figuring out how to handle language diversity can be an early task of peer networking leadership. Some approaches also can serve psychological as well as practical purposes. For example, parts of network meetings might be conducted both in Spanish and English - especially initial welcoming and agenda-setting tasks.

2 - Space

The “space” defined by all these communication tools, organized to promote easy and regular interaction, sets the stage for the routine and ongoing conduct of peer networking. Our interviewees emphasized the positive role of habit in setting up this space - if people become accustomed to certain meeting times, to receiving certain communications, and to having certain well-defined options for how they interact with others in the group, this will help the peer networking activity to take on a life of its own. This can be particularly helpful in confronting one of the ongoing problems with any peer network - attrition in membership and level of participation over time.

The peer network’s space for interaction needs to be clearly identified, with boundaries set by its governing structure - which in the case of the BHC Hubs will be their steering committees. Part of the advantage of a clear identification is that it offers an easy way to welcome new members into the group, or to pro-

vide a simple way for current members to connect remotely. Several interviewees noted the need for an orientation procedure (perhaps even something in print or electronic document form, combined with an interpersonal touch) to get new members on board. Such orientation can help new participants understand the way in which the peer network is organized, and how they can best contribute.

3 - Resources

The information, human and financial resources needed to run the peer network and to incentivize activities are also an important component of any peer network. Particularly in grassroots communities, peer networking often begins with unfunded, relatively informal activities, and they can have considerable impact at this level. Even when informal, networks need ready access to information about the issues they are addressing, and about what is happening in the community. And once they become an important part of the community change process, most networks need additional resources to be effective. TCE's providing funding support for the BHC Hubs is a reflection of that.

As is reported later from the Annie Casey Foundation research, peer networking can be quite costly. According to those interviewed, frequently the money resources available for peer networking simply are not sufficient to achieve any kind of scale. The peer networking activity does not grow to its full potential because it is under-resourced. Even when outside support to provide resources is available (to build information systems, hire staff, etc.), as is the case for the BHC Hubs, periodic assessment of resources compared to peer networking goals is essential. Otherwise, particularly if there is any kind of "mission creep" and the peer network's ambitions grow as it develops, ambitious goals can outstrip available resources with resulting limits on impact. Such a "resources assessment" can be a regular part of peer networking activities, preferably on a quarterly or at least twice-annually basis.

4 - Problem-Solving

Interviewees provided numerous examples of how a peer networking activity had contributed to practical problem solving in a community. One of the most powerful aspects of a network is that it provides some structure by which problem-solving takes place. Of course informal, unstructured problem solving has always been part of community life, and that will continue to happen regardless of whether there's a peer network or not. What peer networking does is to provide a platform for structuring that problem-solving for greater intensity and efficiency.

Peer networking participants need ground rules for bringing problems to the network for consideration - in particular, they need to know how to balance between problems that are tied to advancement of the overall community change goal of the network, versus those that are somewhat idiosyncratic to their organization. A balance is important for motivational purposes - part of what keeps people coming to the table in peer networks is the ability to obtain problem-solving resources for their own organization (both to increase their own motivation and provide justification for their participation to others in their organization).

The network also needs to have a structure for problem-solving activities. In some cases, this can be as simple as having a time allocated during each networking meeting for this purpose. Other options include creating a web section (perhaps formatted as a blog) on a network website where problems can be presented and responses given by other network members, or making a listserv function available so that responses can be given by e-mail reply. As with other network activities, a curating function is essential for success - the peer network's coordinator needs to organize and keep these activities updated. In addition to providing ground rules, communications structure and other organizing elements for problem solving activities by a peer network, evaluation data also can contribute by providing examples of success. Again because

peer networking is a marginal activity, participants will set their involvement partly out of their observations about impact. If there are credible evaluation data showing that past problem-solving activities have led to measurable improvements or actions being taken, that will increase the motivation of network members to be active participants in the future.

Strategy: Good Practices and Challenges of Peer Networking

In the Backer (2008) study, 19 peer networking activities of the Annie E. Casey Foundation were examined, yielding ten good practices and ten challenges of peer networking. The good practices constituted the reasons network participants found these activities to be of value, and the challenges were the roadblocks to initial implementation and/or sustainability.

In thinking about how all of these factors apply to the development of the BHC sites and their Hubs, one overarching principle to keep in mind is one of the eight elements of high-performing companies from Peters and Waterman's (1987) groundbreaking book, *In Search of Excellence* - "simultaneous loose-tight properties." Strategies for good peer networking almost always need to be implemented with a simultaneous regard for structure and flexibility, so that they can be effective but also responsive to changing circumstances.

1 - Good Practices

The 2008 study synthesized process observations by leaders of the 19 peer networking activities into 10 "good practices" - that is, generally observed process features that were too general and informally documented to be called "best practices" in the conventional sense. But they collectively provide a kind of checklist for attributes of peer networking activities that seem likely to promote success, all other things being equal. Each of the good practices is listed here, along with brief observations about how these relate to the BHC Hubs.

- ***Provide a safe, trustful place for participants to interact on topics important to them***

The central importance of trust already has been discussed. Each BHC Hub might create something like a “commitment to trust” one or two-page document that lays out how the peer network will operate, how it will deal with both transparency and confidentiality, plus how it will deal with any violations of trust. This document can then be shared both electronically and in print format, including for orientation of new peer network members.

- ***Encourage personal as well as professional interactions among participants***

In the Casey peer networks, there was latitude for people to talk about some personal matters if they wish, which led to personal interactions that in some instances were very powerful. For instance, when a member of one network became ill, two other members flew in to the member’s location at their own expense, to visit the member in the hospital and provide psychological support. Both the latitude and the boundaries for such interactions might be included in the “commitment to trust.”

- ***Customize the peer networking structure to meet specific participant needs***

Early discussions among the Hub’s leadership can identify ways in which structure can be set, for example, to fit with already-established and comfortable traditions of group communication in the community, and to support community efforts related but not limited to BHC (e.g., looking at larger themes for promoting children’s health in the community). Also, a process can be defined early on for how to periodically re-assess the peer networking structure so that it can be refined to reflect changing community needs and priorities.

- ***Promote opportunities for the participants and their organizations to collaborate***

Making time available at Hub meetings to explore collaborations among network members, and to report on them subsequently, can help to create a “culture of collaboration” in which peer networking participants think naturally of how their goals could be better met by working with other members.

- ***Encourage participant feedback about the strengths and challenges of peer networking***

Evaluation activities are discussed elsewhere in this paper. Results from the Casey studies indicate that opportunities need to be structured in for gathering feedback, and if it is gathered, there is an absolute commitment needed to actually share the results with all relevant parties. Periodic re-assessment of evaluation needs and use of results can also be part of the Hub’s activities.

- ***Build the activity’s initial success before broadening its range of participants***

Several interviewees made a point of recommending that the BHC peer networks encourage a broad range of participation from their communities. As interviewee Peter Pennecamp put it: “Homogeneity builds comfort, heterogeneity builds change.” However, the Casey peer network experience suggests that if this push to broader inclusiveness comes too early in the life of the network, it can lessen the chances for success because of the extra energy it takes just to handle diversity.

It is particularly important to look for natural networkers in each site - e.g., representative of community foundation, what interviewee Ben Maultsbeck of Hispanics in Philanthropy calls “the heart of place-based philanthropy in this country.” Interviewee Frank Farrow of Center for the Study of Social Policy

suggested that it is important to organize peer networking meetings so that it is possible for committees or sub-group meetings to mix people who aren't role alike - change happens by having a lot of different partners working together. Real bottom up procedures can help when it does become time to broaden participation in the Hub. Often this means using "outside the box" strategies for participant recruitment. For example, interviewee Robert Woodson calls for going out into the community, by-passing the traditional identified community leaders and talking with informal gatekeepers in the community such as hair-dressers and barbers about natural leaders who are not part of organized systems.

Other interviewees also emphasized the importance of carefully determining who comes to the table in the first place. While informal leaders who are not part of the mainstream system should be included, it also is important to screen out possible network members who cannot get beyond their own narrow agenda, or are needlessly confrontational.

- ***Offer resources for participants to translate ideas into action***

One of the Casey peer networks provided small grants to network members for support of special projects. These were reviewed by the entire network membership and approved on the basis of overall intelligent design plus external need for whatever innovation was being supported. Discussion amongst the Hub's participants can help to shape TCE resources that will be available for supporting networking-related or inspired activities.

- ***Create sub-groups within the peer networking activity to focus on particular topics of interest***

Focused small groups of role-alike participants were mentioned both in the Casey study and by interviewees for this study as desirable elements of peer networking. Often these small groups emerge naturally out of discussions that

happen in larger network meetings, and the focus is on a particular problem or task. Periodic time at peer networking meetings to identify how these sub-groups can be created by the Hub, and how they relate to overall network activities, can help these sub-groups to be productive.

- ***Shape the activity by analyzing the successes of other peer networking activities***

Peer networking participants can benefit from looking as a group at selected research and experience on peer networking. For instance, a summary version of this paper could be prepared and made the basis of an unstructured dialogue or, alternatively, a more formal training session for Hub staff and peer networking leaders in each site. Both successes and challenges need to be addressed in such an exchange.

But success and challenge also are present at the local level, in the very community where the peer networking activity is taking place. Local wisdom about what works and what doesn't can have a powerful impact, as much as national research. What barriers from bad past experiences need to be overcome in order that the Hub will be successful? Almost all communities have had some bad experiences with other peer networking activities they've been part of in the past. These will affect the success of the Hub unless they are dealt with honestly as part of the current group process (including identifying what lessons have been learned from these past experiences and how to avoid similar problems in the future).

- ***Level the playing field by sharing basic information about the focal area of peer networking***

Particularly when some of the desired peer networking participants are people whose expertise or job role are not in the primary goal area of the project, it is important that all Hub participants have some working knowledge about the

field in which they're participating. In the Casey study, it was mentioned that this need often surfaces when acronyms or technical terms are not understood by some of the participants, which can lead to confusion and mis-communications.

2 - Challenges

Experiences of Casey's 19 peer networking activities also yielded valuable information about the challenges to peer networking. Ten challenges were identified, and again each will be presented here along with a brief discussion of how they relate to BHC peer networking activities.

- ***Peer networking is costly in both time and money***

As already mentioned under "Resources" above, peer networking organizers need to gather basic information about how much their activities are costing, both in human resources and financial ones, so that questions about impact for the investment made can be addressed. Given that peer networking is seen as a "marginal" activity, as discussed elsewhere in this paper, during tight financial times there may be friction over the question of costs, and the Casey study found that these activities can become quite expensive, particularly if they involve traveling people to meetings, coordinating staff time, costs for bringing in expert speakers or consultants, etc. Having cost data available also can help motivate network participants to creatively identify lower-cost alternatives for achieving their goals.

A regularly-published report by the Hub on peer network costs can be part of the network's transparency policy, so that there can be an open discussion about the value added of this investment. Such a report could be posted online at the network's website, for example.

- ***Participants in peer networking may find it difficult to take action on good ideas they've developed***

Again because peer networking is a marginal activity, when participants go back to their home organizations, it can become very easy for the energy and commitment truly felt during a network interaction to dissipate. Building in structures for follow-up - e.g., progress reports on commitments to action given at the next Hub meeting, availability of coordinator staff to assist with follow-up, etc. - can make a significant difference in this regard.

- ***The goals of peer networking may be difficult to identify and to share with others***

Members of the peer network need to have their “elevator speech” for sharing with others in the community what the network is about and what impact it is having. This is important for building wider community support both for the Hub and for the BHC project as a whole.

- ***Peer networking may be difficult to integrate with other activities of its sponsor***

Peer networking participants also may need the “elevator speech” to communicate with others in their own home organization, who may have difficulty understanding the purposes of the peer networking activity or why scarce time and other resources should be devoted to it.

- ***It may be challenging to balance equality with expertise in selecting peer networking participants***

While peer networks for community change, especially in diverse, complex communities, need to involve a wide range of stakeholders, sometimes the people who can contribute the most in terms of technical expertise, energy available, or

access to other kinds of resources come from more narrow backgrounds. Then choices may need to be made by the network leadership about who comes to the table.

- ***Organizational complexity and culture of a peer networking sponsor may limit chances for success***

In the Casey study, certain challenges arose from how peer networking activities interacted with the management style of the foundation sponsoring them. Such challenges may develop for TCE and the BHC peer networks as well, and the critical factor is to anticipate that such challenges are possible and to build in mechanisms that can handle them if they do arise.

- ***It may be challenging to develop a good exit strategy for a peer networking activity***

Whether for a specific sub-group activity or the peer network as a whole, it is important to recognize that peer networking seldom is intended to be a permanent operation. If plans for wind-down or transition to some other status are built in from the beginning, the transition is likely to be much smoother.

- ***Replicating peer networking activities may be difficult***

Even when well-documented as to process and outcome, successful peer networking activities may be hard to transfer from one site to another. The role of an overall BHC network coordinator can be critical to successful transfer, along with the creation of a structure for the 14 Hubs to interact with each other so that they can share ideas and innovations readily.

- *Participant turnover may limit the success of peer networking*

Inevitably, there will be turnover in the member of a peer network. Having a regular procedure for handling such developments is essential, so that new members can be recruited, oriented and brought into effective participation in the Hub.

- *Individual and group psychological factors may limit the success of peer networking*

Peer networks are made up of people, who have mis-communications, conflicts and personal agendas that can impede the success of the network operation as a whole. The key to dealing with these problems, as in other challenges, is to have a structure set in place in advance, so that relatively low-key, efficient conflict resolution is possible.

These good practices and challenges interact in complex ways, and the simultaneous loose-tight properties rule of Peters and Waterman applies, as it does to all elements of peer networking and place-based initiatives. Both high tech and low tech communication approaches have their places, for example.

3 - The Role of Technology in Good Practice

The activities studied in the Casey research were primarily conducted through in-person meetings, conference calls, circulation of printed materials and e-mails - "old technology" by 2010 terms. Interviewees in the present study emphasized that these traditional methods still have an important place in the operation of an effective network, especially if a significant number of members feel more comfortable with these approaches than the newer ones.

In this study, a number of “new technology” approaches were discussed:

1 - technology platforms like cell phones, to which voice messages can be sent, and smart phones which can receive e-mails, text messages, instant messages and documents, all curated by the peer network coordinator and disseminated only to those who have requested communications in these particular ways.

2 - communications media like blogs or webinars to help people connect and exchange promising practices, ideas or concerns. Again the issue of curating is essential - these methods only work well when the content is highly targeted and so are the lists of those who receive each type of communication (and only receive the ones they have signed up for!).

3 - social media - increasingly, the younger members of a peer networking group rely on tools like Facebook and Twitter as important communications mechanisms. Peer network members from the younger age brackets may be especially likely to volunteer to work together on these.

4 - social network mapping - these are computer programs which display relationships graphically amongst a group of people or organizations, pointing out patterns which can have an important impact on the success of a network. This approach can be particularly useful as part of an initial planning activity to structure a network, looking at how it can best be set up serve a particular audience.

In fact, all of these media choices need to be addressed using a central planning framework, one that chooses media on the basis of what people in the group need, and what will help advance the larger cause. A critical question says interviewee Deborah Meehan: “What technology are people already using and what are they comfortable with?”

These new and emerging technologies also reflect an evolving philosophy, a leadership style called “working wikily,” as set forth in a recent **Stanford Social Innovation Review** article by the Monitor Institute’s Diana Searce, Gabriel Kasper and Heather Grant (2010). This approach is characterized by greater openness, transparency, decentralized decision making and collective action. It is embodied in the wiki, a website that allows groups of people to collectively create and edit the website and information on it (the best known example is Wikipedia). The new and emerging technologies both make it easier to operate this way, and put pressure on people throughout society to do so. They can more easily visualize, communicate with and act on information and on existing networks, and to forge strong communications with new ones. Thus the real transformation today isn’t just in the technologies but in the way people think, form groups and go their work, based on these new tools and on networks they can help to create.

Our interviewees recommended getting youth involved in developing the proper role for new media and particularly social media. The BHC program already has positioned youth involvement in bringing the arts to the work of BHC. This is another and very useful channel for involvement, and also for getting the most up to date input, particularly for how communications can best be done with youth.

Websites for individual Hubs also may be part of the planning mix for communications, along with a national website addressing all of BHC. TCE already has set up the website CalConnect to tie the 14 BHC sites together, including the Hubs as they develop. Examples which might be studied further for possible ideas to refine CalConnect and help create individual Hub websites include:

* **Community Clinic Voice** This online gathering place for safety net health care professionals and partners has many features worth exploring. It has several thousand members and has taken nine years to build to this level. Community Clinic Voice has a full-time staff person who is the moderator and constantly

refreshes content. It also has sub-groups that are active on an ongoing basis - billing clerks and physicians for example, and it has a core of “super users” who are the governance structure (www.communityclinicvoice.org).

* **California Convergence** The California Convergence website is an important vehicle that connects over 40 communities across California that seek to improve the food and physical activity environments of their communities. In addition to providing face-to-face peer networking, the comprehensive website features virtual peer learning networking (VPLN) as a space for sharing, problem solving and collaboration. Web conferencing is also offered on topics related to policy strategies and other local and regional work (www.californiaconvergence.org).

Other websites also could be included in this analysis. For example, although it is not a place-based initiative, the Leadership Learning Community, which strives to advance a more just and equitable society by transforming the field of leadership development, gives its network members access to a variety of resources and networking opportunities via its website. For instance, learning circles are conducted both face-to-face and online, and member interaction is encouraged through the website (and also through wikis and online communities).

In the recommendations section of this paper, it also is suggested that a meeting of these projects with peer networking-oriented websites would be useful. All of these types of input can help to shape BHC’s CalConnect.

Immediate Outcomes of Peer Networking

Three major outcomes from peer networking were defined by our interviewees and the literature reviewed for this study:

1 - Learning

Specific problem-solving, general information that builds understanding of the overall goal, the road to it, and the process of peer networking itself. A peer network is a learning community, according to many of those interviewed, and the results of this activity often include learning that can be put to work immediately in making progress towards the larger goal of community change, using the long-established principles of adult learning. Our interviewees emphasized the importance of structuring the peer network to encourage learning. This can be done, for example, by providing time at the end of each peer networking meeting for a review of key principles and observations made; or a summary of these points can be sent out electronically after the meeting is over.

2 - Capacity Building

There is a need for initial assessment not only of readiness for a peer networking function focused on the larger community goal (on the part of the funder as well as the community and the potential participants in the peer networking process), but also for ongoing capacity building of all organizations involved with the peer network. Such capacity building may include skill development or providing knowledge for individual peers, but the emphasis here is on organizational capacity building.

No assumption should be made about initial capacity for peer networking, just because a community has come on board with BHC. As interviewee Peter Pennecamp put it, "Initial conditions are critical, as in physics" with respect to ultimate success of a place-based initiative or a peer network supporting it. Inter-

viewees consistently emphasized both the need to assess initial capacity to do good peer networking (are there people in a community willing to participate, is there a fairly good infrastructure already set up for peer networking on related topics, is there a good electronic infrastructure in the community, etc.). To the extent that organizations and entire communities are not well-equipped to do this kind of activity, they cannot succeed no matter what resources are available or how urgent the community challenge is.

Also, there is the question of whether a community is ready to have a peer network on a particular topic. Interviewee Karl Stauber says the biggest mistake Northwest Area Foundation made in its place-based program was paying insufficient attention to readiness - "you can't buy it, though you can invest in it." Peer networking can even help to create overall readiness for change in a particular area of intervention.

It isn't always possible to change initial conditions, but capacity can be built to work around them so that they are less intrusive on achieving the goals of the peer networking activity. For example, some people are simply more inclined to do peer networking than others - this is an initial condition not subject to change, though in other cases the interest in peer networking can be increased.

One aspect of the underlying philosophy of many place-based initiatives is exemplified by the Chip and Dan Heath book (2010), ***Switch: How to Change Things When Change Is Hard***. What the book calls in its discussion of the challenges of change management "looking for the bright spot rather than the dark" is one way of saying it. As peer networks and the place-based initiatives they support examine the communities in which the work of change is being done, this translates into looking for community assets rather than pathology. This approach also underlies asset based capacity building approaches, which have become more common in community development in recent years.

3 - Infrastructure

The third immediate outcome of effective networking is a contribution to the overall development of infrastructure for achieving the larger goal of community change. The peer networking activity becomes a part of the larger architecture of policy change and direct community action, peer networking actually may help to lead the overall change effort, as already indicated above. A peer networking meeting could be expanded into a broader “town hall” type of gathering, helping to set the stage for action. This infrastructure may be somewhat different depending upon the specific task of the networking activity. Interviewee Dayna Cunningham says that it is important to draw a distinction between peer networks for purposes of building leadership for a community change effort, practical implementation of that effort, and creating a community-wide coalition to support it.

In particular, leadership and implementation peer networks need to be small and focused - if they have large numbers of participants they tend to become unwieldy. Careful choices need to be made about group membership for both these purposes. As Cunningham puts it, “Leadership should be a microcosm of the problem you’re trying to address.” On the other hand, a community coalition to provide general support for a community change effort needs to be large, because it needs to bring together all the relevant stakeholders.

Ultimate Outcomes of Peer Networking

The ultimate outcome of peer networking as part of a place-based initiative is to contribute to significant community change. TCE has defined this community goal at three different levels - the global goal of improving children’s health, four big results towards which the BHC program will be directed (described above), and 10 more detailed and specific outcome areas.

LESSONS LEARNED

Several interviewees emphasized the importance of keeping the larger goal of peer networking “up front” in all these activities - given the complexity of in-person and electronic interactions that make up peer networking, it is very easy, they said, to get caught up in the process and lose sight, at least temporarily, of the larger objective. Peer networking presentations and learning materials should feature a briefly-stated reminder of the larger goal (in the case of BHC, perhaps at least down to the level of the four big results, and perhaps a 10-line synopsis of the more specific outcome areas as well).

Both foundations and Federal government agencies have undertaken the creation of place-based initiatives in recent years. These are aimed at achieving a diverse array of community changes.

Foundation Place-Based Initiatives

In the 1990s, a number of large, national foundations rejected categorical, program-focused approaches in favor of a more ambitious strategy for transforming poor communities called Comprehensive Community Initiatives (CCIs) - which, as mentioned earlier, are also called place-based initiatives since they concentrate their resources on particular neighborhoods or cities. As Kubisch et al. (2010) put it, they “go beyond the achievements of existing community-based organizations, notably social service agencies and community development corporations (CDC), by concentrating resources and combining the ‘best’ of what had been learned from social, economic, physical and civic development in order to catalyze transformation of distressed neighborhoods. In contrast to other community initiatives that focused on one intervention at a time - such as the production of affordable housing units or improving the quality of child care - CCIs adopted a comprehensive approach to neighborhood change and worked according to community building principles that value resident engagement and community capacity building” (p. vi).

Over the subsequent 15 years, these foundations developed, implemented and evaluated a number of these large programs. A few of the major initiatives are:

- Neighborhood Improvement Initiative (William & Flora Hewlett Foundation)
- New Futures (Annie E. Casey Foundation)
- Making Connections (Annie E. Casey Foundation)
- Neighborhood and Family Initiative (Ford Foundation)

A recent update on these foundation initiatives was provided in the 2009 first issue of a new journal, *Foundation Review*, which described the work, chal-

allenges and accomplishments of a group of initiatives. Articles in this special issue focused on Children's Futures (Robert Wood Johnson Foundation), Healthy Communities (Colorado Trust), a community-based collaboration in Austin, Texas (Hogg Foundation for Mental Health), Yes We can (W.K. Kellogg Foundation), and Urban Health Initiative (Robert Wood Johnson Foundation), among others. These essays reported many accomplishments of these initiatives, as well as a number of problems and shortcomings.

A major element of these approaches to community change is selection of a group of community sites in which to make these interventions. This place-based strategy ranges from choosing two or three within one geographic area, to 15 or more, often spread across the country. The initiatives are called comprehensive because they have multi-year time frames (some of them lasting as long as ten years), and because they employ a multi-component, cross-disciplinary approach that might simultaneously include direct services, advocacy and public policy, leadership development, strategic communications, and research and evaluation.

The initiatives typically are organized under theories of change about how all the components weave together to have impact on larger-scale community change. These theories are often expressed in logic models that map the process of change, so it can both be better understood and evaluated. The underlying principle is that distressed communities require simultaneous, coordinated interventions if a real difference for the lives of residents is to be created. In a recent cross-cutting review of 11 initiatives (Trent & Chavis, 2009), the following factors were identified as contributing to the success of a place-based, CCI initiative:

- A single entity acting as broker and keeper of the vision
- Clear, well-defined roles and responsibilities
- Alignment between goals, strategies, institutional interests, resources and geography

- Meaningful community engagement
- Competent leadership and the right staff capacity
- Strategic connections between the community and the public sector (city, state and federal)
- Integrated strategies that “connect the dots”
- Effective planning and evaluation
- Flexible funding to respond to a changing community context
- Clear articulation and measurement of desired community change results
- Intentional focus on creating the capacity for scale
- Use of data to drive the initiative and influence policy change
- Community ownership of the initiative from the start
- Building and sustaining the capacity of institutions rather than programs
- Long-term sustainable funding

Many of these success factors relate directly to the use of peer networking approaches as part of the overall strategy for community change, as do the underlying principles of community building.

This same study identified five lessons for funders engaged with these initiatives:

1 - *Know thyself* - take the time to clearly articulate the foundation’s own motivations and expectations regarding the initiative

2 - *Do your homework* - build a solid understanding of the problem and what is needed to solve it

3 - *Stack the odds in favor of success* - make sure the initiative has the necessary ingredients for success

4 - *Be accountable* - performance matters, and foundations should be prepared to hold grantees - and foundation staff - accountable for performance. Poor performers drag down the success of everyone involved.

5 - *Keep it manageable* - limit the number of sites to those ready and prepared to engage at the expected level of performance.

These lessons also speak directly to the desirability of creating a peer networking activity to support a place-based initiative for comprehensive community change.

Other key lessons learned from recent evaluations of place-based initiatives include:

1 - Traditional models of change are insufficient for fully describing the complicated processes involved in such significant efforts; a more “ecological” approach is needed, which presents the community as a living system in which the initiative intervenes at a number of levels. It is inside this living system that peer networks like those being created with the BHC Hubs exist, and the networking activities need to deal with these complexities (e.g., by creating multiple channels for communication with very diverse audiences).

2 - Unified leadership (spearheaded by a single broker or keeper of the vision, as already mentioned) is essential within the community, both to mechanically coordinate the initiative’s many activities and to implement a single vision for change. Again, a peer networking function can foster this unified leadership. Also, coordination and leadership across multiple sites is important if the overall multi-site initiative is to be successful - hence the call later in this thought paper for the Endowment to hire an overall coordinator of BHC peer networks.

3 - Despite the ambitious nature of these complex and costly programs, results from evaluations of place-based initiatives show consistently that foundations

ultimately have only limited power to create change. Some of this is related to the difficulty of making larger-scale change happen in complex, disinvested and sometimes rather dysfunctional American communities. But also this kind of systems change work is not necessarily a foundation's strong suit, so many have tapped intermediary organizations to help or even be the primary implementers. To the extent that BHC has intermediaries involved, even in consulting roles (e.g., the Public Health Institute and its several subsidiaries), input from these interveners needs to be considered in designing, implementing and evaluating peer networking activities at the community level.

4 - Capacity building is a key aspect of place-based initiatives - building the strengths needed by all those organizations involved in doing the work of community change (including, in some cases, initiating and maintaining peer networking systems); capacity building usually is needed by community organizations, intermediaries and funders as well. Capacity building will certainly have an important place in the work of the BHC peer networks, both in building the strength of the network itself, and in using the network's activities to facilitate capacity building for all the actors involved with the 14 sites.

The most recent and largest-scale appraisal of comprehensive community initiatives (Kubisch et al, 2010) examined 48 CCIs. It begins by noting that the landscape of community change work has grown and diversified in recent years, with Community Development Financial Institutions (CDFIs), banks and anchor institutions (such as hospitals or universities), as well as additional foundations, expanding this work with poor communities. These additional "players" need to be considered as part of the resource landscape when a place-based initiative is being created - and brought to the table in peer networking activities as well.

The Kubisch et al. review confirms most of the findings from individual and comparative analysis already cited in this thought paper. It adds a major new insight - the most successful initiatives are those that managed to align all the diverse pieces of their work, and ensure that they reinforce each other. Five dimensions

of alignment, most of which have been identified in other evaluative reviews, are associated with success of CCIs:

1 - Clarity about mission, desired outcomes and operating principles

2 - Intentionality in action (interventions must be made for carefully identified purposes, rather than just hoping that results will be a by-product of other actions)

3 - Assessing and building capacity of all the community partners

4 - Effective management of partnerships and collaborations

5 - Learning and adapting along the way

Peer networking clearly has a role in helping initiatives achieve these alignments, particularly with respect to the fourth element, managing partnerships and collaborations.

Despite all this analysis of factors that lead to success for place-based initiatives, and some evidence of real impact for these efforts to create community change on a number of topics, according to most observers, these place-based initiatives have had a mixed track record of success to date (this was confirmed by Kubisch et al. in the review cited above). The problems experienced by some, like the Neighborhood Improvement Initiative (Brown & Fiester, 2007) and New Futures (Annie E. Casey Foundation, 1995), have been well-documented, with great learning benefit for the field.

Thus, caution is appropriate for any new efforts in this realm - not that they can't be successful, but that success is far from easy. That is also one of the lessons about peer networking from the studies done by HIRI (Backer, 2008, 2009), by Monitor Institute, by Center for the Study of Social Policy (2003;

CSSP & EZ/EC Foundation Consortium, 2001) and others. It too is a potentially-valuable but difficult-to-achieve activity, so all of the lessons and cautions presented in this paper need to be taken very seriously.

In fact, the time for these place-based, comprehensive community initiatives as a leading force in philanthropy may have passed. One of their key documenters (as described above), interviewee Anne Kubisch of the Aspen Institute Roundtable on Community Change, says that “national funders don’t do much place-based philanthropy on the national level with multiple sites any more. Funders are inclined to do more that’s local and issue oriented.” And an increasing amount of the place-based work supported by foundations today is being done by embedded funders, described in the next section.

As a result, the peer networks many of these funders created in the “heyday” of comprehensive community initiatives are also going out of existence. Participant organizations or local funders in some cases are willing to pay a kind of membership fee to keep a network going, now that national funders are no longer paying for it, but in other cases the networks are simply closing down.

But there are still some major initiatives being implemented. Building Healthy Communities, of course, is one. Another new place-based initiative is the John S. & James L. Knight Foundation’s Knight Community Information Challenge (KCIC). This initiative has funded a number of place-based funders (they are community foundations) to address the changing information needs of communities, and new options available for getting information to communities. KCIC also has other key elements - a commission of experts, an annual seminar, a group of traveling consultants to provide technical assistance to the individual sites, and a substantial combined evaluation and shared learning component. All of these may have potential for further exploration by BHC as part of efforts to put this program into a larger context.

Government Place-Based Initiatives

As so often happens, an innovation pioneered in the foundation sector now is being picked up by government - there is a new wave of place-based initiatives in the government sector. One example is the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention's Academic Centers for Excellence in Youth Violence Prevention. Based in major universities, these ten centers all are developing and implementing a wide range of programs to prevent youth violence in American communities. This CDC program now is moving into its third cycle of funding, and the Centers being re-funded are all required to pick a particular community in which they will work to implement evidence-based programs for youth violence prevention.

This represents a significant policy shift that also is affecting many other parts of CDC. There has been increasing emphasis placed on demonstrating actual impact of CDC's funding on injury and mortality related to violence, and this requires a place-based approach plus use of evidence-based programs, so that it is possible to measure and report success or failure in fairly concrete empirical terms.

Similar shifts are being made by other Federal agencies - identifying what works as proved by research (evidence-based programs) and promoting implementation in focused community sites so that there can be equally focused evaluation of results. This has resulted in a new focus on place-based initiatives throughout Federal government, which is the result of an expressed policy of the Obama Administration. In addition to the CDC youth violence prevention initiative, these new initiatives also include:

- Department of Education's Promise Neighborhoods
- Department of Housing and Urban Development's Choice Neighborhoods
- Department of Justice's Weed and Seed

- Department of Health and Human Services/Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration's Community Recovery and Resiliency Initiative

The Department of Education's Promise Neighborhoods program, which has just select its first set of grantees, is perhaps the best-known of these initiatives. It is focused on adaptations of the Harlem Children's Zone, a highly successful and evidence-based, place-based initiative in the New York City area. Promise Neighborhoods has stimulated widespread response from communities eager to participate in the program, and collaboratives having some of the features of peer networks have already been created in many communities even before the grant decisions have been made. The grant requirements include participation in a community of practice designed to extend peer networking throughout the Promise Neighborhood group of grantees.

Created in 2009, the Department of Housing and Urban Development's Choice Neighborhoods provides grants to support the transformation of public housing in distressed neighborhoods. The goal is to transform these neighborhoods into viable and sustainable mixed-income environments by linking housing improvements with appropriate services, schools, public assets, transportation and access to jobs. Peer networking activities will bring together public housing authorities, local governments, nonprofits and for-profit developers for comprehensive local planning with residents of the community.

The Department of Justice's Weed and Seed program aims to prevent, control and reduce violent crime, drug abuse and gang activity in high-crime neighborhoods, currently 250 of them across the country (sites for this place-based initiative range in size from several neighborhood blocks to several square miles). At each site, the relevant US Attorney's Office plays a leadership role in organizing local officials and other key stakeholders to form a steering committee, which plays a peer networking function for this effort.

The focus is on (1) “weeding out” violent criminals and drug abusers through cooperation between law enforcement agencies and prosecutors; and (2) collaboration between public agencies and community-based nonprofits to “seed” much-needed human services (prevention, intervention and treatment) and neighborhood restoration.

The SAMHSA Community Recovery and Resiliency Initiative is focusing its funds into three communities that have been seriously affected by the economic downturn. Each project will undertake an evidence-based, multilevel effort using a public health perspective to bring behavioral health innovations into the identified community. Communities are selected on the basis of hard data about their economic circumstances, e.g., 12% or higher unemployment rates.

These five programs all are focused on community change goals that also are relevant to BHC, and all have some form of peer networking to provide guidance to the program, even if it is not labeled as such. All are weaving together a variety of community agencies, local policymakers and other stakeholders to work on achieving their goals. A further analysis of these government programs might be helpful in identifying specific strategies for peer networking that could be used as part of BHC. For example, the leadership role played by the US Attorney’s Office in Weed and Seed might provide guidance for how the BHC Hubs could interact with their local public health agency director.

A Related Model: Embedded Funders

As mentioned above, interest in the foundation community and in researchers on place-based initiatives such as Chapin Hall at the University of Chicago, has moved into a more focused and local approach called embedded funders (Karlstrom et al., 2009). Embedded funders are place-based foundations that (1) commit to working in a particular community or communities over an extended period of time; (2) pursue direct and ongoing relationships with a range of community actors; (3) make community relationships and partnerships a primary

vehicle of their philanthropic operation; and (4) provide extensive supports and resources beyond conventional grantmaking.

Interviewee Robert Chaskin emphasizes that embedded funders tend to have “direct and unmediated relationships with community actors, a long-term commitment, and a level of transparency and flexibility in doing the work.” Because the funders live in the community, they can more easily be either entrepreneurial or political to leverage influence on behalf of the community change goal they have embraced.

These efforts are often correlated with a commitment to civic engagement, as seen in the work of embedded funders like the Denver Foundation and Piton Foundation in Denver, the Humboldt Area Foundation in largely rural Northern California, and the Jacobs Family Foundation in southeastern San Diego. Chapin Hall’s work with embedded funders included a peer networking group of them which met for several years, funded by the Annie E. Casey Foundation. Now Casey’s support has ended, but the group has chosen to continue on a more limited and self-supported basis.

While the Endowment does not “live” in any of the 14 communities selected for participation in BHC, the emphasis embedded funders place on building relationships between the funder and grassroots community leaders, and on providing support beyond grants, certainly offer encouragement for BHC to move in these directions. Consultation with local leaders might also identify some other ways in which TCE could become more “embedded” in style and symbol.

Finally, at least one embedded funder is launching a place-based initiative that might have direct learning value for TCE. The Piton Foundation has long been supporting work to better serve disadvantaged children and families in the Metro Denver region. At first the foundation was focused more on poverty, but now has moved into education. In a new place-based initiative, Piton has identified “the children’s corridor,” an 18-mile long geographic region that has the greatest

needs in the state of Colorado. The corridor has had a recent influx of Hispanic families, most of them immigrants, which presents particular challenges.

Los Angeles - Foundation and Government Place-Based Initiatives

The longest-running and best known place-based initiative in Los Angeles was Los Angeles Urban Funders, which worked in three economically disadvantaged neighborhoods for ten years, 1996-2006. LAUF created a consciousness about place-based initiatives which continues to this day. More recently, a number of second-generation place-based initiatives have been created, including:

California Community Foundation's Community Based Initiative (CBI) in El Monte is focused on positive outcomes for children and youth. The Foundation's Board of Directors recently approved a revised approach of the initiative and will continue funding for seven additional years. Peer networking has not been signaled out as a specific strategy.

First 5 LA's Best Start Program was created as a place-based initiative after a year and a half of planning. It will target 14 communities in Southern California, making a \$125 million, multi-year investment. While this is a new initiative and is just beginning the implementation phase, it is anticipated that communications and peer networking will play a central role. Each community will develop its network with the help of a dedicated community facilitator.

Flintridge Center's Northwest Pasadena and Altadena Initiative Flintridge Center (formerly Flintridge Operating Foundation) is deeply embedded in its region of funding, and has made a long-term commitment to working with local nonprofits, community leaders, and the government and business sectors to address the critical needs of children and youth. Much of their work now is concentrated on nonprofit capacity building and on building community collaborations. Flintridge does not operate a peer network per se, but because of

its leadership's long and deep engagement with the community, much informal peer networking occurs to support these activities.

Kaiser Permanente's Healthy Eating, Active Living Program has had a regional approach and is focused around a medical center's reach. The program aims to promote healthy eating and physical activity through environmental and policy changes, and is currently in a strategic planning process and is looking at how to incorporate place-based approaches into their current efforts. It is anticipated that the new plan will feature a peer networking component.

Los Angeles County Department of Public Health's PLACE Program (Policies for Livable Active Communities and Environments Program) seeks to foster policy change that supports the development of healthy, active environments for county residents. Currently in three communities, the program has a peer network with five of its grantees. Meetings have focused on creating action plans and extending learning opportunities.

Los Angeles Partnership for Early Childhood Investment is a young network of early childhood professionals from 35 member organizations. The partnership has evolved into a structured network. Only two years old, it has undergone a planning process which outlined its governance structure and established policies. The learning community is the most highly regarded aspect of the partnership's work.

Providing a platform for discussion of these initiatives is the Los Angeles Place-Based Learning Group. Now in its second year, executives from 15 private and public foundations have been meeting to learn from each other the successes, challenges and lessons learned of current place-based efforts in Los Angeles. The group has used a case study approach looking at the best practices from national models and seeking to incorporate them into their work. Most participants are engaged in place-based work, others are exploring how to deepen their work or begin new ventures. Documenting current Los Angeles efforts

and demonstrating already significant financial investments is helping to bring national attention to the region.

The Group's interchanges so far have identified some lessons learned from local peer networks:

1 - Peer networks need to understand their purpose. Peer networks can be a highly effective and efficient way to gain insights and knowledge; however, it is clear that successful networks take thoughtful planning, good organization and skilled facilitation. From the beginning, there needs to be a sense of what the community wants to achieve and how long they expect to be together. Peer networks are the most successful when there is a goal to do something.

2 - Members of peer networks need to be engaged and feel that their participation is valuable. Getting everyone engaged in a good conversation and participating fully can be quite challenging. While focusing on commonality of purpose seems to alleviate some of the discomfort in sharing and problem solving, networks need to make sure to demonstrate some progress towards goals - otherwise networks become just another meeting. Polling peer network members periodically can help encourage their active participation. It can also serve as a quick evaluation tool to assess problems and allow for mid-course adjustments.

3 - Peer networks can be supported by a number of communication tools. Peer networks thrive when there is open, clear, consistent communication. There has been much focus recently on technology such as interactive websites, online communities, wikis and webinars. Conventional communication such as face-to-face convenings and conference calls add value indicating that there is no substitute for human interaction. The key appears to know how and when to use the best communication tool for a network, what works for one may not for another.

The following recommendations are made for consideration by the Endowment, and by the 14 BHC sites, as they work together to shape peer networking as a component of Building Healthy Communities.

1 - Develop both the 14 Hubs and the overall BHC peer networking infrastructure using knowledge about peer networking identified in this thought paper

In the BHC Planning Phase evaluation, site participants said they want ongoing support for the implementation of the Hub and for communication systems within it. While all the sites and the Endowment have previous experiences with peer networking, and each community already has some elements of a peer network set in place, the Building Healthy Communities Initiative represents an opportunity to “move to a new level” in thoughtful planning and implementation of peer networking.

This can begin by using the Grid and the 10 good practices and 10 challenges to form a kind of “planning checklist” by which the process of shaping a Hub can begin. As the elements of effective peer networking are implemented, and the likely roadblocks Hub implementers will need to confront are identified, in many cases the Endowment can at least offer some common resources. These often will be resources aligned with what the Endowment will be shaping for its overall development of peer networking for BHC. All parties can read the thought paper, and have a discussion about what it means for practical implementation of peer networking through the Hub concept - what’s relevant and what isn’t.

For example, the evaluation tools discussed in the thought paper can be appraised by the Endowment and by Hub coordinators in order to identify what may become a common evaluation approach. This will be a good labor-saving strategy for BHC sites, and also will provide some comparable data about peer networking across the 14 sites. But as with each element of the Hub operation, all parties will need to work together to find a balance between common

structure and individual needs - that concept of “simultaneous loose-tight properties” again! One other input involves the Social Network peer learning network created by the Annie E. Casey Foundation (Bailey, 2005). This activity supports the development of community-based peer networks in Casey’s Making Connections initiative. It began with a literature review on social networks, and continued with a network effort that was focused on the networking process itself.

For the Social Network, participants explored their own experiences and how these could contribute to the shaping of a peer network. They also identified other examples of successful networking and actually visited the sites of these successes, and brought together leaders of the six identified successes for a brainstorming and review meeting. A “toolkit” for local network use was prepared out of these developmental efforts. The successes and challenges of this effort could be analyzed, including dialogue with its leaders at Casey, to identify additional lessons learned for BHC and its Hubs.

Nine additional steps, all based on the learnings about peer networking identified here, can be taken to help create the necessary infrastructure:

- First, the Hubs will continue to evolve, along the lines of Butterfoss & Kegler’s three-stage model for coalitions, so strategies for each Hub and for the overall BHC peer networking effort need to build in periodic review, followed by opportunities to re-shape the peer network if needed.

- Second, the role of the Hub steering committee at each site will vary tremendously based on who is selected to participate in it, and what point of view they represent. Our interviewees said that it is particularly important that there are people willing to put community above their own interests - this is also true for all network members. The learnings from this thought paper can help to shape steering committee membership standards, as well as to provide some input for orientation of members when they first come on board.

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- Third, the Hub's host organization will benefit from integrating the BHC activity with other parts of the host organization, and with how peer networking in general interfaces with the community. Peer networking experiences presented here repeatedly show that this integration is fundamental to success of a peer network. These activities are by their nature somewhat marginal to the day-to-day operations of a program, so every effort must be made to integrate them meaningfully.

- Fourth, the Hub is responsible for developing the BHC site's logic model, for which it has decision authority on the ground. In addition to shaping this document editorially to make it short and easily-readable, Hub participants can involve youth participants with media technology skills in shaping its graphical presentation, and in its wide dissemination in various media so that it is well-known throughout the community, not just among the peer network members.

- Fifth, the larger knowledge base presented here needs to be integrated with local experiences, good and bad, starting with an assessment of the local neighborhood's history with peer networking. In some cases, Hub participants may want to organize a "learning session" on the state of the art in peer networking. A local expert on the subject might be brought in to speak, and participants could be given as reading materials, not only this thought paper, but also the two HIRI/Casey Foundation studies described here, along with the draft version (which is continuously evolving online) of the Monitor Institute's guide.

- Sixth, if this hasn't already been done, it would be helpful to prepare a summary of peer networking experiences, positive or negative, of the Endowment's related initiatives, such as the Latino Obesity Prevention Initiative and the California Counts! Program. Both could provide valuable insights on peer networking as part of the above analysis.

- Seventh, there is a need to look at how youth can be involved in BHC both through the arts and through new and emerging technologies. A question

about arts involvement, already alluded to above: how can the artistic gifts of youth participants be blended into the activities of the Hub, such as the physical look of the logic model that is developed, a logo for the local project to be used in both electronic and print communications, etc.?

- Eighth, the peer network can look at how the Hub might offer youth opportunities to participate in the local democratic process, including efforts designed to support and advance the work of the BHC site. This can start with issues of concern in the implementation of the network and of the overall goals of the community change effort on children's health, as defined by the BHC site.

- Ninth, the peer network can devote sessions to exploring what kinds of incentive programs can be developed to support the work of the BHC site, involving both funds and recognition for achievement. Several ideas are given below for how such incentive programs might be shaped.

2 - Hire a Building Healthy Communities peer network coordinator

A particularly important action, according to many of our interviewees, is for the Endowment to hire a full-time peer network coordinator responsible for overall activities within the BHC program, and to serve as liaison with the 14 individual Hub coordinators. Ideally this person will be a natural "connector," as defined in Malcolm Gladwell's book, *The Tipping Point* (2000) - someone with many community and nonprofit sector connections, and with a natural gift for bringing people together and motivating them to collaborate.

Interviewees consistently said that there was a need for, as interviewee Robert Chaskin put it, "some kind of executive function" to guide and interweave the many activities for which it would be beneficial to have some type of cross-talk among the 14 sites. The BHC Hubs need somebody who has a larger view, coming from understanding of both knowledge and practice about peer networking and place-based initiatives, as well as direct experience in community organizing

and organization development. Also, this needs to be an individual with persuasive powers, who can tease out of the group what direction they would like to take, then pursue it.

Part of this person's role will revolve around the need for BHC peer networking events and website content to be "curated," as interviewee Suzanne Siskel said. That is, the content needs to be constantly adjusted to the needs and preferences of network members, and a coordinator also can identify new topics for workshops, make connections between people in sites in the form of informal "peer matches" so they can discuss a common problem, and connect people with information they need about both the content and the process.

This is a challenging position to fill, because it requires an array of talents as defined above. It might be filled by someone young (perhaps even a graduate student), who would have enthusiasm and energy, plus knowledge about new media and the ability to use them readily. Or it could be filled by someone more senior who has a broad array of personal contacts and a good interpersonal style.

The peer network coordinator also could be responsible for creating a "suite of peer networking tools" the Hubs can use to facilitate their activities, as outlined in this paper - (1) the overall planning checklist based on findings from the paper, (2) a model "commitment to trust" document setting forth process rules, (3) a financial planning worksheet, (4) a communications activities worksheet, and (5) a network readiness assessment checklist.

3 - Create systems for sharing best practices in peer networking and place-based initiatives among the 14 BHC communities (as part of an ongoing learning community and a rapid response system for problem-solving)

The communications systems created for each Hub will play a heavy role in this larger sharing operation, which can be managed by the BHC peer network coor-

dinator. There is a need to set up an ongoing system for sharing, on a website and perhaps in other media as well. Communication of best practices might include a monthly or even weekly series of brief summaries sent out by e-mail, phone or other media. And the BHC peer network coordinator can set up a warehouse of these online, as has been done by a number of national projects on community change and evidence based practices - like the Promising Practices Network. These would include unique elements of each BHC site, so that other sites know what worthwhile activities they might learn about through a peer match. The BHC overall peer networking coordinator also can arrange specific peer matches among the 14 sites, along the following dimensions:

a. **one-off peer matching** - like the Making Connections Peer Matching system, one site can learn from the other by making a site visit to a successful program in another area

b. **ongoing peer matching** - the BHC coordinator can match two sites so they can have ongoing learning and evaluative role each to the other

Further analysis of Annie E. Casey Foundation's experiences with the TARC peer matching system could help to shape this effort. Dozens of peer matches have been made among Making Connections sites, and the Center for the Study of Social Policy has evaluated these activities fairly rigorously (Backer, 2009).

4 - Set up peer networking activities to help community leaders think about children's health - even if that is not the primary responsibility

Getting community leaders involved in the peer network is a critical element, but beyond that the network members also need to invest effort in finding ways that BHC will meet the programmatic, fiscal, and political needs of their organizations and others in the community, as well as the individual professional growth needs of participants. This means looking at how addressing children's

health fits with the mission and priorities of these community organizations, sometimes in rather indirect and creative ways.

A particularly compelling example is the DARE program for preventing youth substance abuse. DARE was successfully implemented and maintained in many communities across the United States not only because it offered assistance with a youth problem of great concern to communities - it also was valued because it significantly supported police-community relations. Chiefs of police in many communities loved it - it got police officers into the community, interacting with parents and teachers as well as children. Ironically, this value was influential in promoting long-term survival of DARE despite overwhelming evidence from empirical research that DARE did not make a difference in preventing juvenile substance abuse! DARE has continued to this day because it meets community needs beyond those of substance abuse prevention.

What are the analogous secondary supports that Building Healthy Communities might provide to organizations and their leaders whose support is needed for BHC to succeed, but that are not directly focused on children's health?

Also, how can the Hub identify and encourage this "secondary rewards" process? Interviewees for this study suggested that peer networks can periodically inventory their participants about how the community work supported by the peer network can meet other community needs, then focus discussion on how to implement these insights.

5 - Create peer networking activities with sensitivity to multicultural and multilingual challenges

Interviewees emphasized the importance of careful selection of who represents each diverse group - regardless of their group membership. Are they really speaking for the group they purport to represent or are they really speaking for themselves or their organization? Also do they have the skills to interact

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successfully with others and do the work of the peer network? Vested interests can be worked with if they are clearly laid out and a procedure arranged to prevent them from coming into play inappropriately - informal inquiries with trusted community observers can help with this.

For multilingual challenges, some strategies are quite straightforward, such as having website and peer networking events in languages other than English. In California, Spanish is a particularly likely second language for the elements of BHC. It should feature website and in person communications in Spanish. Also look at what is being done by other communication systems to address multilingual concerns. According to interviewee Gayle Haberman, “the city of El Monte seems to have had the most success engaging residents in a culturally sensitive way. Spanish is integrated well into meetings and outreach communication. In communities where the grantee population is at 30-40% minority, the Public Health Department has had to really push its grantees to make cultural competence a priority. Cities and communities know they should, but don’t.” El Monte’s successful strategies could be analyzed to yield ideas relevant to Hub operations, and other case examples also identified.

In a related note on technology, Haberman also indicated that for the most part, “new technologies do not work in minority or poor communities. One very effective communication tool has been the use of ‘robo calls,’ automated calls generated by the local schools and their principals.”

Often things break down because of simple lack of understanding of differences among peer network participants, says interviewee Dayna Cunningham. For example, if you are a poor and undocumented person, a broken tail light is a very different matter for you than if you are a citizen and middle-class. This kind of sensitivity can be developed through “teachable moments,” and made a part of the process of peer networking, our interviewees emphasized.

It should be stressed again that few of the peer network leaders interviewed for this study had direct experience in setting up networks that enabled participation in languages other than English. It is also suggested that a learning event be organized for the BHC Hub coordinators, TCE staff, and the overall peer network coordinator, to brainstorm about other options for dealing with language and cultural diversity. One possible outside expert to be considered for inclusion in such an event is Dr. Mareasa Isaacs of the National Alliance of Multicultural Behavioral Health Associations, whose prior work for Annie E. Casey Foundation and other foundations gives her important background about the interface between multicultural elements and place-based initiatives of foundations.

6 - Use peer networking to stimulate leadership development in each of the BHC communities

The Hub can be used to identify leadership development needs in the BHC communities. The peer networking process itself, through its problem solving and information sharing components, serves to develop leadership skills among the participants, helping them be more alert to additional needs they may have. In addition, the Endowment's partners, such as Public Health Institute, already are involved in leadership development for nonprofit and community leaders; some of these efforts might be connected with BHC communities to meet identified leadership development needs.

A particular emphasis of these activities might be placed on policy advocacy and change. Because the BHC sites are all in one state (many previous place-based initiatives were in multiple states), a focus on policy is somewhat easier. Both site-based and cross-site peer networking can be used to help BHC community leaders learn about and use tested strategies for policy involvement by nonprofits and community leaders, and to inventory the policy change resources

that already exist within the peer network. Tie-ins could be made with capacity-building programs in the policy arena, such as CompassPoint's foundation-supported effort to provide training to nonprofit leaders about the California legislative process and how to intervene successfully with it.

7 - Develop BHC site capacity to deal with multiple place-based initiatives in the same community, and to integrate them into peer networking

Some funders and community leaders have expressed concern about what will happen if a community funded by one place-based initiative receives support for one or more additional initiatives, especially if there is overlap in objectives and participants. Perhaps because Promise Neighborhoods was highly visible during the time interviews for this thought paper were conducted, much of the concern was focused on this program. The concern included the desire to avoid "collaboration fatigue" and other symptoms of organizational dysfunction suffered by communities (and individual leaders) who are involved in too many community efforts. And it included the desire to maximize opportunities for synergy if resources for community change are available through more than one initiative, as well as to avoid overlap and duplication.

It is likely that at least some BHC peer networking participants will be aware of other place-based initiatives in their community, so that the Hub's platforms for interaction can be used to bring the other initiatives to the attention of all, and to discuss how synergy can be heightened and any negative impact reduced. Representatives of the other initiative(s) also can be invited to participate, as guests or regular members, in the Hub so that their input can be sought and efficient arrangements for "co-existence" devised.

8 - Promote wider learning by convening other key peer networks in California, to learn about their best practices and to promote appropriate partnering

Getting together leaders of some of the other exemplary peer networks in California, such as California Convergence, Community Clinics, and some of the Los Angeles place-based initiatives identified above, could be done through a convening, focused on sharing information, best practices, and possible collaborative strategies. As with the other place-based initiatives described in the previous recommendation, these peer networks have the potential for both interfering overlap and productive exchange, so active discussion and problem-solving negotiation are the key.

9 - Create a brief Guide to Peer Networking and Place-Based Initiatives, to share with the 14 sites and with the larger fields of philanthropy and the nonprofit sector

Such a guide would be very brief and oriented specifically to place-based initiatives, so would not be duplicative of other publications such as the Monitor Institute's in-process guide. It would present in user-friendly, summary form and with specific action steps the material in this thought paper. A dissemination plan could be devised to share this guide beyond the 14 sites, through on-line or print publication, or both.

10 - Use outside the box thinking to identify and implement innovative ways to increase the impact of BHC's peer networking activities

The following suggestions were made by interviewees during this study:

* Give a **BHC prize**, administered through the Hubs collectively across the 14 sites. This is a way of getting community attention. Prizes serve three somewhat different goals. The first is to reward past achievement; the second is to reward having already solved a problem (an example is the X Prize invented by Dr. Peter Diamandis); and the third is to reward future problem solving (an example is the Ashoka Changemakers initiative and the TED Prize).

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* Model a **BHC event** for the 14 peer networks or some representatives from each site, after the annual Technology, Entertainment, Design (TED) conference in Long Beach. This conference features 50 speakers each with an 18 minute slot. Everyone shares the same experience - emerge from the trenches we dig for a living, and ascend to a 30,000 foot view to see the interconnected whole.

* Start a **BHC Speakers series** with PODCasts for those who can't attend in person - to bring particular speakers on peer networking and place-based initiatives to share their expertise.

* Create a "**personal biography video show.**" The Durfee Foundation Stanton Fellows program has included creating what might be called the "Ken Burns kind of slide show/video with past participants reading from their application" on "Why do you do what you do". This video will be posted on a website as a stimulus for a blog.

* Review **Voices from the Field III**, which was published in September 2010 and was reviewed briefly in the body of the thought paper (Kubisch, et al., 2010). This important work presents a 20-year retrospective on place-based initiatives. Created by the Aspen Institute Roundtable on Community Change, the book will be the subject of a series of convenings around the country. The Endowment and its Building Healthy Communities Initiative might offer to host the California or West Coast convening, and bring as participants the leaders of the 14 sites, including the Hub coordinators.

* Hold **Neighborhood** Circle events. At Lawrence Community Works in Massachusetts, the pioneering work of community activist Bill Traynor includes such strategies as Neighborhood Circles, where residents come to dinners hosted by trained facilitators who encourage people to share their stories. The aim is to have good conversations, connect and take action - campaigns for budget reform and garbage cleanup are among the practical projects that were started informally through these dinners.

* Explore **synergies** between a place-based initiative's peer network and those of individual nonprofits. A recent book, *The Networked Nonprofit* (Fine & Kanter, 2010), looks at the growing importance of social media-based networks developed by individual nonprofits. These networks can be used to build relationships with supporters, gather information by listening and meet service objectives by connecting people in the community with the nonprofit's services. As these technology-based networks become stronger forces both for individual nonprofits and the communities they serve, they can also be valuable resources for coordination and partnering with peer networks like the BHC Hubs.

* Explore **synergies** between the place-based initiative's peer network and other activities of the organizations implementing or funding them. Interviewee Janice Pober described how her place-based activities in corporate contributions for Sony have dovetailed neatly with activities in other departments of the corporation, like government affairs. Such synergy also is possible for nonprofits participating at different levels in a place-based initiative, e.g., through their community outreach work to reach clients, advocacy work to connect with government policymakers or funders, etc. A funder like the Endowment may also find connections between peer networking aspects of an initiative like BHC and its other grantmaking and program related investment activities, as well as its policy advocacy and community education efforts. The point is to look for opportunities to build synergy wherever they might exist.

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Appendix A: Thought Leader Interview Nominees

National

Robert Chaskin, Chapin Hall

Tony Cipollone, Annie E. Casey Foundation

Dayna Cunningham, Urban Planning Department, MIT

Tom David, Tides Center

Barbara Dyer, Hitachi Foundation

Frank Farrow, Center for the Study of Social Policy

Leila Fiester, consultant

Janis Foster, Grassroots Grantmakers

Heather Grant, Monitor Institute

Larke Huang, Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration

Jan Jaffe, Ford Foundation

Tom Kelly, Annie E. Casey Foundation

Anne Kubisch, Aspen Institute

Ben Maulbeck, Hispanics in Philanthropy

Deborah Meehan, Leadership Learning Community

Terry Minger, Piton Foundation

Carol Naughton, Purpose Built Communities

Peter Pennekamp, Humboldt Area Foundation

Mark Popovich, Hitachi Foundation

Alberto Retana, US Department of Education

Connie Chan Robison, Center for Collaborative Planning

Diana Scarce, Monitor Institute

Suzanne Siskel, Ford Foundation

Ralph Smith, Annie E. Casey Foundation

Karl Stauber, Danville Regional Foundation

Larkin Tackett, U.S. Department of Education

Joan Twiss, Center for Civic Partnerships

Alana Vivolo, CDC Academic Centers for Excellence in Youth Violence
Prevention Program

Julie Williamson, California Convergence

Robert Woodson, Center for Neighborhood Enterprise

Local

Wendy Chang, Dwight Stuart Youth Foundation

Reuben DeLeon, First Five LA

Vera de Vera, California Community Foundation

Mark Eiduson, Flintridge Center

Shirley Fredricks, Lawrence Welk Foundation

Gayle Haberman, Los Angeles County Department of Public Health

Chris Hershey, HersheyCause

Jaylene Moseley, Flintridge Operating Foundation

Michele Myszka, Pacific Life Foundation

Claire Peeps, Durfee Foundation

Alvertha Penny, California Community Foundation

Janice Pober, Sony Pictures

Cody Reudaflares, Kaiser Permanente

Roberta Tinajero-Frankel, Kaiser Permanente

Gwen Walden, LA Partnership for Early Childhood Education

Anne Whatley, HersheyCause

Lisa Wilson, Flintridge Center

Appendix B: Thought Leader Interview Questions

1 - How do the grantees and community leaders involved in a place-based initiative (a) communicate with each other, (b) build awareness of the problem their initiative is focused on, (c) share best practices and (d) help each other solve emerging problems?

2 - How are these activities integrated into a “peer network,” and how should it be organized and supported as part of overall systems change?

3 - How can peer networking approaches help to handle the challenges of cultural diversity in a place-based initiative?

4 - What role can new media, from technology platforms like cell phone text messaging to social media like Facebook, play in peer networking for a place-based initiative?

5 - How can funders of a place-based initiative best participate in a peer network?

6 - What new developments in place-based work should we examine, including both those funded by philanthropy and by government?

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ABOUT THE HUMAN INTERACTION RESEARCH INSTITUTE

Founded in 1961, the nonprofit Human Interaction Research Institute conducts research and provides technical assistance on the challenges of change in the nonprofit sector. For more than 20 years the Institute has studied philanthropy from a psychological standpoint - exploring how to improve philanthropic strategy, and how to integrate donors and foundations into the work of community change. The Institute works closely with government and foundation funders of nonprofits, helping develop grantmaking strategies, facilitating dissemination and implementation of innovations, and evaluating both the process and outcomes of systems change.

A psychologist, Institute President Dr. Thomas Backer has written widely on philanthropy, and was a member of the International Network on Strategic Philanthropy. He also is Associate Clinical Professor of Medical Psychology at UCLA Medical School. Janice P. Kern is Senior Research Scientist at the Institute. In her consulting practice she leads several philanthropic peer networks, including the Los Angeles Place-Based Learning Group, and is board president of the Los Angeles Trust for Children's Health.

For more information: www.humaninteract.org