

El Monte Community Building Initiative
Outcomes Evaluation Report
Executive Summary

Prepared by Special Service for Groups for the California Community Foundation
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The Community Building Initiative (CBI) is a ten-year, place-based initiative undertaken by the California Community Foundation (CCF) to improve the quality of life for low-income residents in El Monte. CBI seeks to engage the entire community in one location, invest in long-term change, and ensure such change is sustainable after CCF's involvement ends. The overall goal of CBI is to ensure that children and youth in El Monte grow up healthier and better prepared for college and a career.

To achieve this goal, CCF has promoted projects in the three CBI Outcome Areas of: (1) Youth and School Supports; (2) Healthy Lifestyles; and (3) Family Assets. CCF funded 15 non-profit organizations (Grantees) to implement specific strategies to impact these three Outcome Areas. In addition, CBI staff provided capacity building services and activities to develop community leadership to increase civic engagement as well as to build organizational infrastructure in order to promote social change.

In November 2010, CCF contracted Special Service for Groups (SSG) to conduct a one-year Outcomes Evaluation, intended to examine short-term outcomes related to Grantee programs and larger initiative systems change work in each of the three Outcome Areas during one year of implementation. This Executive Summary provides highlights of the Outcomes Evaluation study.

The SSG Evaluation Team's methodology included an archival review of Grantees' Progress Reports and an analysis of their program data, as well as data from focus groups, surveys, and key informant interviews with program participants, policymakers, and community leaders.

Outcomes: Systems Change

The Evaluation Team found that the most significant outcomes from the CBI initiative were at the larger systems change level in the two Outcome Areas of *Youth and School Supports* and *Healthy Lifestyles*. In both instances, these changes occurred within a relatively short time period and evolved organically as a result of a strong partnership between CBI staff and local El Monte community leaders. This is paralleled by the work of some Grantees in these Outcome Areas. These accomplishments are particularly significant in light of the current economic recession and massive cuts to public education and government programs and services.

As a result, the Initiative is transforming from one of isolated Grantees conducting individual projects, to one of large-scale, cross-sector collaboration. This transition is critical to securing CCF's goal of long-term sustainable change because it mobilizes and involves large numbers of individuals and sectors within the community. Their increased involvement and ownership of

the project creates a greater likelihood that the community will continue the work after the Foundation's commitment ends. To reflect this transition in the Initiative, the Outcomes Study report emphasizes the progress and results from this systems change work over those of individual Grantees.

Factors contributing to this transition include:

1. A core of indigenous community leaders who have set aside their individual agendas to embrace a common mission

A significant number of leaders in key policy positions were raised in El Monte, earned advanced degrees, and returned to contribute to the community. This also includes CBI staff. They bring an intimate knowledge and a level of community trust that is often illusive to other projects, or can take years to build. Key informants noted that these leaders are deeply and very personally passionate about CBI's work.

2. CBI staff facilitation and CCF infrastructure

Key informants consistently cited CBI staff as essential to the success of the Initiative. The characteristics they valued most were the staff's ability to listen well, understand the needs and perspectives of all constituencies, serve as a catalyst for cross sector collaboration, impart of sense of urgency, and nurture a sense of vision. A Stanford University study notes that in the few instances where large initiatives have been successful in *system-wide* change, success can be attributed to the funder's provision of the infrastructure required to coordinate broad cross sector collaboration.¹

3. A nimble, responsive, and organic approach to initiative development

CBI's ability to respond nimbly to organic initiatives from the community is an important factor in this transformation. As community leaders have stepped forward to move the work in new directions, CBI staff has demonstrated the flexibility to respond in a timely manner with active displays of support. This encourages greater involvement of institutions and sectors. Overall, stakeholders feel strongly about CBI's potential, and see it as a unique convergence of funders, extraordinary community and civic leaders, and parents who care deeply about their children's future.

Systems Change: Youth and School Supports

Long Term English Language Learners (LTEL). CBI saw significant accomplishments in its support for Long Term English Learner (LTEL) students. El Monte is served by three different school districts that were not aligned in their work and lacked inter-district communication and coordination. Through the facilitation of one of the CBI grantees, all three districts have made a commitment to align their policies and practices around English Language Learner instruction, a rare occurrence in the state.

¹ Kania, J., & Kramer, M., (2001, Winter) Collective impact, *Stanford Social Innovation Review*

Similar to districts across the state, LTEL students were not clearly identified and targeted, nor did a uniform definition of LTEL exist. As a result of CBI, all three districts have agreed upon a formal definition, identified LTEL students, and developed and agreed upon benchmarks and indicators of student progress. Three inter-district teams are studying alignment of Language Arts and LTEL instruction. Key informants see this work as ground breaking and a model for the state, with the project report impacting policy at both the state and national levels.

El Monte Promise. Although not a part of the original Initiative design, CBI has provided support to local leaders who have initiated a “cradle-to-college” pathway of support for students starting at kindergarten and extending through 12th grade. The El Monte Promise (“Promise”) is a collaboration between the El Monte Coalition of Latino Professionals, CCF, all of El Monte’s school districts, Rio Hondo College, UC Irvine, CSU Los Angeles, the City of El Monte, First 5 LA, and parents. The collaboration recognizes that educational institutions require system-wide change to support this pathway, and that a college-going culture needs to be developed among families.

With a planning grant from CBI, an inventory and assessment of all educational supports offered by all school districts serving El Monte was conducted. The Promise has committed to fund the first two years of college tuition for every El Monte student. The collaborative has already raised \$35,000 towards the goal of \$50,000; and is targeting an additional \$25,000 by the end of the year. The City hopes to contribute \$50,000 through redevelopment funds.

The collaborative is also developing a “pledge” program of guaranteed preferential registration and enrollment as well as pending admission to any student who completes its requirements. In August 2010, the high school district finalized a pledge agreement with Rio Hondo College and UC Irvine that included priority admissions to both schools and priority transfers to UC Irvine. CSULA was added to the pledge in 2011.

Next steps include the formal establishment of a scholarship fund operated by stakeholders, prioritizing systems changes to address over the next four years, and addressing issues of sustainability.

The current focus of CBI staff is to develop strategies to integrate parent engagement efforts with the Promise’s “cradle-to-college” pathway in a systems-based approach. One school district has already taken the lead on its own initiative and adopted an evidence-based, system-wide approach within a low-cost budget at each school. This district plans to develop Parent Action Teams at each school using Title I and other categorical funding, while they seek funding for parent partnership training and to build other components of this approach. CBI staff is in a unique position to play a facilitation role in order to further strategic coordination.

Systems Change: Healthy Lifestyles

This CBI Outcome Area has been characterized by the development and strengthening of working relationships between the City of El Monte and CBI, as well as among CBI grantees, the City and grassroots groups. The programs and resources shared by CBI grantees working

toward engaging youth in more physical activity have helped to create an emerging network of agencies and community groups who share a common goal of getting El Monte residents active and healthy. These efforts draw upon and provide assistance to local leaders, providing a strong foundation from which to engage more El Monte residents in physical activities and creating a culture of regular physical activity that can be sustained by grassroots efforts and local leaders.

One of CBI's systems change effort in this Outcome Area has been to support the City in prioritizing health and wellness policies and programming. CBI staff played a pivotal role in identifying a significant funding opportunity which allowed the City to expand its health policy staff and prioritize community-wide efforts to improve resident's health.

The City of El Monte was only one of three successful applicants for a Los Angeles County Department Public Health (DPH) grant, through which it was awarded \$100,000 annually from June 2008 to 2011, which supported the (1) creation of a full-time Health and Wellness Coordinator within the Department of Community Services; and (2) adoption of a Health and Wellness Element ("Element") in the City's General Plan. The DPH noted that the City's application was distinctive in that it included a letter of support from CCF, and that CBI had impressively large community meetings with over 100 residents in attendance at a time providing input to the Plan. These large turnouts serve as evidence of the momentum and engagement created by CBI.

The Health and Wellness Element institutionalizes a city-wide, long term commitment that aligns with CBI's Healthy Lifestyles focus. In addition, many of the Plan's components mirror CBI priorities for program outcomes. This alignment is also evident in the work of CBI grantees in this Outcome Area.

Collaboration between CBI and the City also resulted in other documented accomplishments, including completion of walking trails and clubs, a food policy, a Healthy El Monte website, and close working relationships between City staff and several CBI Grantees.

Conclusions

CBI has evolved significantly from an individual grant-based approach to a systems-based approach, which emphasizes cross-sector collaboration. This approach both supports and builds on Grantees' program activities.

Key stakeholders and program participants agreed that CBI played and should continue to play an essential role beyond grant-making. In particular, CCF is in a unique position to be a catalyst for positive social change in El Monte by:

- (1) Developing grassroots leaders to participate in decision-making process in public institutions, such as city government, schools, and school districts;
- (2) Providing venues for and facilitating discussions for cross-section collaboration between public institutions, community-based organizations, and community members;

- (3) Leveraging funding opportunities by partnering with peer philanthropic organizations;
and
- (4) Increasing capacity of community-based organizations in El Monte to provide responsive and effective services to residents and families and to become competitive in acquiring funding for their work.

It is important to note that while large-scale, system-wide initiatives can be costly, they are also highly leveraged investments, magnifying existing funds by millions or even billions of dollars.² CBI staff are coordinating the efforts and increasing the effectiveness of organizations with combined budgets well over CCF's \$1 million annual investment. The challenges and effectiveness of this type of effort is described in a recent Stanford study on collective impact, as such:

*"Mobilizing and coordinating stakeholders is far messier and slower work than funding a compelling grant request from a single organization. Systemic change however, ultimately depends on a sustained campaign to increase the capacity and coordination of an entire field."*³

Recommendations

CBI's task moving forward is to focus emerging health/wellness and education networks into the areas of development noted above, while simultaneously building capacity for community leadership and organizational infrastructure to sustain the results. This will require transitional staff independent of CCF and CBI, and the establishment of funding sources independent of CCF. Given the findings this study, the SSG Evaluation Team makes the following recommendations.

Youth and Social Supports

- Further integrate CBI components to support the El Monte Promise "cradle to college" pathway, with an eye towards long-term sustainability, including parent and student engagement
- Continue development of English Language Learner policies and practices across all El Monte school districts, including but not limited to professional development for teachers to strengthen instructional programs for EL and LTEL students
- Identify outside funding sources and provide staff to take on these tasks as the El Monte Promise collaborative evolves.

Healthy Lifestyles

- Continue support of grantee programs that use a partnership approach and engage the grassroots in creating a culture of regular physical activity for all El Monte residents.

² Kania, J., & Kramer, M., at page 41

³ Kramer, M.R, (Fall, 2009), Catalytic Philanthropy, *Stanford Social Innovation Review*. Retrieved September 28, 2011, from http://www.ssireview.org/articles/entry/catalytic_philanthropy/

- Explore further alignment of City of El Monte's Health and Wellness Plan goals and CBI funding priorities.
- Require CBI Grantees to utilize City-sponsored avenues for outreach and relationship building with other providers in the area, such as the Healthy El Monte Coordinating Council and HealthyElMonte.com website.

Family Assets

- Explore integration of Grantee programs to support youth education goals through the El Monte Promise's "cradle to college" pathway.

Community Capacity Building

- Host a contractor convening for all contractors working on community capacity building together to share insights, articulate needs/conditions for further capacity building work, and coordinate efforts, if/as needed.
- Strengthen evaluation processes for Capacity Building efforts. Further document impact of mini-grants by providing training for leaders and/or hosting focus group of leaders to assess project results.
- Develop more active roles for Community Advisory Committee members to represent CBI at community venues, such as Healthy El Monte Coordinating Council, community convenings, etc.
- Develop more intentional and focused topics for convenings. Hold upcoming convenings in target neighborhoods to generate enthusiasm and facilitate resident's attendance. Consider cultivating long-term participation and ways to provide information for newcomers to facilitate their understanding of CBI and their meaningful participation in meetings.
- Provide additional capacity building workshops for mini-grant project leaders on collaboration, evaluation, fundraising (mentioned by one key informant as requested by parents), outreach/publicity, etc. Provide a cohort learning process for project leaders to share lessons and ideas for future projects.
- Solicit Mini-grant applications by themes or focal areas to amplify impact of projects.

Systems Change

- Sustain the success factors that have characterized the CBI in its re-focused form, namely, the involvement of indigenous community leaders who have embraced a common mission; a nimble, responsive, and organic approach to initiative development; and CBI staff facilitation and infrastructure that is well grounded in local El Monte community realities.
- Articulate and share the systems change efforts that have evolved as part of the CBI with a wider audience, as a way to begin the conversation about sustainability after CBI culminates and to contribute to the dialogue around place-based initiatives in Los Angeles County and beyond.