GUIDING

ENGAGING

INVESTING

FACILITATING

Investing in Sustainable Community Change
A Funder's Guide to Community Coaching

by Ken Hubbell and Mary Emery

Introduction

Coaching for community and organizational change is attracting increasing attention from the development and social change world. Many funders now include coaching in their change initiatives portfolio—and it is producing promising results, at least in the short term. This is the conclusion of a group of experienced coaches and representatives from nonprofit groups and foundations who participated in October 2005 and June 2007 roundtables designed to pool their collective knowledge about coaching for community and organizational change.

The participants brought firsthand knowledge of at least eight cross-community initiatives, all involving coaching, that reflected both a commitment to place and the belief that people who are empowered can create prosperous and vibrant communities, successfully reduce poverty, and increase opportunities for children and families. This

> "Our coach gave us guidance and exposure to so many people. She helped us connect with other organizations, community residents, and corporate businesses. "

guide will serve as a source of information for funders considering whether or not to introduce coaching as a value-added investment and those who want to better understand coaching outcomes.

What is Coaching for Community and Organizational Change?

A community coach is a guide who supports communities and organizations in identifying and achieving their goals.

Coaches work over the long-term, building capacity to:

- Improve communication.
- Facilitate and clarify shared visions.
- Resolve conflicts.
- Strengthen relationships.
- Identify and connect to resources, both internally and externally.
- Provide opportunities for individual and collective learning.
- Respond to change.

How Does Coaching Add Value to Community Building Strategies?

Coaching is a valuable nutrient and catalytic agent to any group effort that requires innovative ideas, shared leadership or participation, and comprehensive or integrative approaches across boundaries and economic sectors. Effective coaching, when aligned/combined with other strategic approaches, provides the gestalt and

Over the past 10 to 15 years a number of organizations, funders and practitioners have engaged in an evolving new practice which we call coaching for community change.

What is coaching for community change? Coaches do not assume the typical roles played in communities such as facilitation, teaching, training or mediating.

Ken Cohen, a former Horizons coach in Idaho, developed another definition: Community coaching is an adaptive process tailored to unique community contexts to guide systemic change via participant empowerment. Coaches don't do the work or lead the work; they help communities and community leaders develop the capacity to do their own work. Community coaching at its best is both the art of creating community and the craft of working in community; it is value-driven and adds value. Coaching supports and builds on the best in the community and often leads to catalytic change.

The Coaching for Community Change Initiative (funded in part by the W. K. Kellogg Foundation) developed this guide to as a resource for funders currently working on or planning to work on community change initiatives. Our work has benefitted greatly from the reflections of coaches involved in the two phases of the Rural Community College Initiative (Ford Foundation), the Mid-South Delta Initiative (W. K. Kellogg Foundation), the Horizons and Ventures projects (Northwest Area Foundation), Making Connections (Annie E. Casey Foundation) and others as well.

supportive environment for collaboration, problem-solving, and shared learning for the common good or for creating positive futures.

Coaching is an extremely effective tool for helping groups reframe their operating systems, challenge assumptions, unleash new ideas, transition to new leadership and negotiate partnerships—critical competencies for successful community building.

What Role Do Funders Play in Change Efforts Utilizing Coaching?

In the roundtable discussions on coaching, people identified four different ways funders might be involved in change initiatives using coaching.

Model 1: Funder develops a cadre of coaches that can be brought into a change initiative as needed. Intermediaries or delivery organizations such as nonprofits, community foundations or the Cooperative Extension Service can play a role as part of the project network, particularly in regard to identifying a coaching opportunity at a community or institution, but the coaching role is managed by the funder. Funders often do not have a specific evaluation strategy in place for the work of the coaches but rather evaluate the overall funded strategy.

Model 2: Funder is very invested in supporting coaches and community leaders, creates and supports the cross-community learning and communities of practice, and has an on-the-ground presence. Intermediary or delivery organizations provide administrative support for coaches and participate in funder-led learning and evaluation activities.

Model 3: Funder provides funding to the intermediary or delivery organiza-

tion (typically a nonprofit, Cooperative Extension or other educational institution, or a community foundation). In this situation, the intermediary not only has administrative responsibility but also manages both the coaching and community processes. In these cases the intermediary can be challenged to manage these processes and to also create and manage the learning community focus. Often the intermediary is charged with some evaluation work and, in many cases, the funder also contracts an outside evaluator.

Model 4: The intermediary plays the key role in identifying and engaging funders and manages the community change process, including the coaching, community processes, and administrative and evaluation functions. An example of this model is the HomeTown Competitiveness Strategy operated by the Heartland Center for Leadership Development, the Nebraska Community Foundation and the Center for Rural Entrepreneurship.

How Do Funders Support Coaching Initiatives?

Funders initiate projects that they hope will lead to positive community and organizational change. Initiatives that involve coaching are necessarily more complex given the number of organizations and the layers of interaction. Most initiatives involve four groups of players: the funder's staff; the intermediary responsible for recruiting, training

and overseeing the coaches; the coaches themselves; and the community or organizational team committed to change.

Intermediaries rely on funders for:

- Resources to support the effort.
- A theory of change that identities the roles of each of the groups involved.
- Direction on action.
- Gatherings of the players to achieve common understanding and to develop a community of practice within which people can learn from one another.
- Access to information, practices and research related to the project.
- An evaluation overlay to help each group better understand what is working and how it might work better.
- Feedback from other project locations that is helpful to all.

Funders are in a unique role to identify when the use of a coach is an effective approach to capacity building for a given initiative. They can identify situations where coaches can:

- Add value to other interventions. Coaching augments investments in training, such as leadership development, because it assists communities in successfully adapting best practices to their unique place.
- Help an initiative break through inertia.
- Recognize and mobilize the assets of the community more effectively. By investing in change strategies that are grounded in the locality and owned by the local people, the impact becomes more sustainable over time.
- Support leadership development of project staff.
- Model behaviors such as appreciative inquiry.

What Are Important Considerations for Funders?

The variety of players, as well as the unique characteristics of each participating community or organization, challenges funders and intermediaries. To avoid descending into chaos, coaches work to find the balance between directing action and allowing direction and action to unfold from within using local strengths, assets and values.

Brown, Pitt and Hirota noted in their 1999 monograph that three elements were critical in preparing to use coaches in community change initiatives: commitment to a common vision, commitment to a learning culture and commitment to clear rules of engagement.

These elements were reinforced by the roundtable discussions held with funders and coach practitioners as part of the Kellogg project. Funders must be prepared to address these elements with the intermediary or grantee.

1. Common Vision

Brown, Pitt and Hirota noted that in the absence of a shared vision between funder and communities, the coach has no goals to coach toward. Furthermore, given the complex and stressful nature of Community Change Initiatives to produce results, funders and sites can easily retreat from the original vision. Coaches must have permission and flexibility to challenge not only the site team, but the funder as well.

2. Role Clarity

Intermediaries and funders must take the lead in explaining the project to community and organizational partners. Defending program practices and funder policies can place the coach in the role of enforcer rather than the

guide. While coaches can remind and clarify, placing them in the role of mediating among those roles conflicts with the coaching role which necessarily must focus on the organization or community.

3. Learning Community

Projects need easily accessible mechanisms for sharing experiences among project participants. Convening coaches, funders and other stakeholders periodically provides critical time for reflection and learning. The importance of tolerating mistakes by using trial and error and experimentation as part of a learning community was stressed by all who participated in the roundtables, funder and coach alike. Supporting a learning community approach may be challenging for funders and trustees who are used to a results-driven culture of grants management.

Coaching offers unique benefits to funders, intermediaries, communities and coaches themselves in that successful coaching provides opportunities for all to expand their learning. Although several foundations have evaluated projects that include coaching and concluded that coaching increases the return on their investment in change initiatives, the metrics to evaluate the impact of coaching itself have not yet been developed. Some examples from the roundtable of impact and influence of community coaching include:

- Communities used new ways to live and work together.
- Community teams uncovered new ideas that led to successful community change.
- People came to see the reality of different perspectives so they could work with others more effectively, reduce conflict and create the conditions for a learning community.
- Leaders included the whole community rather than a select few or

the traditional elite.
- Groups successfully challenged the status quo.
- Community groups were able to generate self-direction—to decide for themselves what will work, how and why.
- The group found a way to get unstuck and connect or reconnect their strategic work to their vision.

W. K. Kellogg Foundation evaluators concluded in their 2004 report that, "the most effective tool, as evidenced in all data collection done by the MSDI evaluation team, has been coaching at the community team level" (Academy for Educational Development, Washington, D.C.).

Future Possibilities

Funders at the roundtables felt coaching has great potential—that all are newcomers to this work—yet need to learn more about how it works. "What is the value of coaching within the change process?" Among the ideas suggested at the roundtable:

1. Developing Coaches

All were interested in exploring the option of coaches coming from within the community versus coming from outside the community. If a coach might be construed as being a "critical friend," can a person from within the community really be a critical friend without jeopardizing their relation-

"The coaches were readily available, coming to the community and always just a phone call away. They let us know we were important to them."

ships within the community? Perhaps the inside coach might function more effectively as a coach or mentor to the outside coach to shorten the time the coach needs to learn the community. Funders have networks of consultants and TA providers that may be ideally suited to serve in a coaching role to their grantees. An investment in developing a cadre of consultants out of existing networks is a practical approach.

2. **Communicating Advances in the Field**

What methods work best in helping coaches communicate with others, what peer learning models show the best results, and how might experienced coaches mentor new coaches? What other processes, if any, under-gird the coaching process at the organizational or community level?

3. **Evaluating Outcomes and Return on Investment**

What is the profile of the successful coach? What is the impact of coaching on outcomes? What makes some coaches successful in one environment and not so successful in others?

Conclusion

Introducing community coaching as an investment strategy has been shown to be effective. However, there are critical elements that funders must address. Flexibility, new ways of working with grantees, participation in learning communities and evaluating outcomes are important considerations for funders.

Contributors

Mary Emery is the associate director of the North Central Regional Center for Rural Development at Iowa State University.

Ken Hubbell is the president of Ken Hubbell and Associates.

For more information about community coaching, visit:

http://www.coaching.com
http://communitycoaching.ning.com

The Six R's of Community Coaching

Community coaches work with a whole group or team, the leaders and sometimes on a one-on-one basis. They help community leaders assess **readiness** for community change. They coach for **results** as they help a team get unstuck and move forward. Coaches help leaders develop strong, trusting **relationships** within a team and across the community; they help create relationships that link leaders to resources, information and potential partnerships. Community coaches play a key role in crafting opportunities for leaders to learn from their experiences by creating space for **reflection.** Coaches also encourage leaders to **reach** out to the whole community, to stretch beyond the first glance of what is possible, and reach for a more vibrant and sustainable community. Finally, coaching helps leaders lean toward **resilience** by innovating new approaches and developing and monitoring sustainable strategies for change.

Figure 2. Community Coaching: Six Connected Pieces

RESULTS

READINESS   RELATIONSHIPS   REACH   RESILIENCE

the capacity of the organization and the community for self-renewal through continual innovation

unleashing potential, power & possibility

REFLECTION

READINESS. . . .   PERFORMANCE. . . SHIFT. . . .   RESILIENCE. . . .
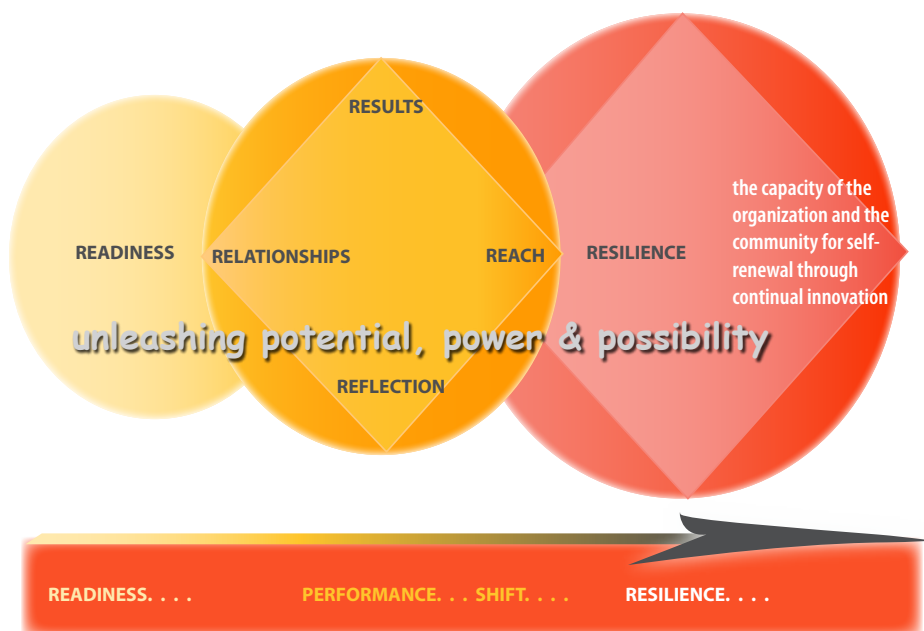
Community Coaching Project/Ken Hubbell 2007

The Case for Coaching for Community Change as an Innovative Practice: Four Reasons

1. **Rapidly Changing Communities.** The rise of the Information Age has required changes in the practice of community economic development and organizational development. No longer can we rely on the expertise of others to guide us and external resources to support us. Communities, organizations and their leaders must identify and build on existing assets and find ways to continually expand their ability to learn from one another and the world around them; ways that are place-based and address the unique challenges and opportunities of that place. *Coaching offers communities a way to make use of best practices and outside expertise by learning how to adapt them based on community assets and capacity and by using local wisdom.*

2. **New Leadership Structures.** Foundations, corporate structures and agencies have poured millions of dollars into succession planning as boomers retire and the organizations restructure around new leadership strategies. *Coaches aid people in recognizing the assets of traditional and non-traditional leaders, while at the same time framing the work in ways that lead to the co-creation of new leadership structures that are more fluid, adaptable and engaging.*

3. **Increased Emphasis on Impact.** The fields of life coach, executive coach and personal coach are growing as people struggle with ways to achieve their goals and adapt to our rapidly changing world. Similarly, communities and organizations are looking for ways to learn about change, apply what they have learned and reflect on that process. *Coaching offers a different approach, one that facilitates leaders' ability to energize and mobilize people around a change agenda and help community institutions become learning organizations.*

4. **Increased Return on Investment.** More foundations are supporting coaching as a way to increase long-term benefits of community change initiatives. *Coaching increases the return on investment in capacity building, leadership development and economic development efforts for outside funders and local investors.*

Sustainable Community Change: Why Coaching and Why Now

For nearly two decades, there has been a focus in the philanthropic and community change networks on capacity building. Ironically, even though most of the field has grown to understand and embrace an "asset or strength-based" approach to capacity building, the term still characterizes the focus on correcting something or someone who is remedial, substandard or inadequate.

As the focus has now centered on sustainability, we believe there is a window of opportunity to heighten attention on a positive and respectful approach to learning and development: community coaching. As a member of the "family of coaching," community coaching is readily associated with "talented people" rising to an even higher level of performance rather than the more prevalent "deficit frame" of capacity building. Coaching rises above the stigma often associated with other developmental strategies.

Community coaching is uniquely positioned to meet the challenge of achieving sustainability for organizations and communities; these communities may be geographic or communities of interest. By building the competencies and skills of people within the community, community coaching recognizes and builds upon the human assets of organizations and communities. Effective community coaching can help transform communities and organizations into high-performing sustainable entities.

Community coaching may also be a useful strategy in addressing the organizational and community barriers of race, class, gender, age, culture, sexual identity and others by establishing a set of principles that embrace diversity as a prerequisite to achieving the highest level of mutual learning. Diversity is in everyone's self interest in a true learning community. The more expansive the diversity, the deeper and more profound the learning.

As we move deeper into the Information Age society, our current roles as content experts, consultants and brokers continue to change. With a plethora of information resources on our desktops, we cannot be the experts for our teams on every topic, but we can be aware of additional resources and, most importantly, we can be the guide on the side to help them plan and implement a successful proactive community-based planning process.

East Carroll Parish in northeast Louisiana straddles U.S. Highway 65 and is home to Lake Providence and other recreational and natural assets. Residents of this rural Louisiana parish are challenged by a declining economy and barriers to change that include racism and hopelessness.

A group of concerned community residents organized the East Carroll Cultural Tourism Initiative and began working to bring the races together through planning and organizing cultural and tourism events—events that also enhance the image of the parish and create economic opportunities through tourism development.

In 1999, the ECCTI was chosen to be a member of the W.K. Kellogg Foundation's Mid South Delta Initiative.

As part of MSDI, the group received a project implementation grant as well as the assistance of a community coach, Ken Hubbell. Team members negotiated with Ken and developed a service agreement based on what the team members felt they needed to be successful and what Ken felt he could provide. After the document was signed, it helped the team and coach manage their relationship and expectations. The agreement was reviewed annually and terms renegotiated based on the team's progress and capacity, and the changing circumstances in the community.

Components of an informal coaching plan that was developed include:

- Help the group stay on task with their proposal concepts, strategies and action plans.

- Help the group master project management when there are several inter-related activities involving multiple stakeholders that must be managed by a small staff and a busy, volunteer board.

- Build the team's capacity in facilitation, team collaboration and leadership for change.

- Help the team identify and locate resources.

- Provide a "mirror" to the team that reflects insightful observations and challenges about their collaboration, shared leadership and capacity building.

- Help the incoming director understand the history of the Initiative, organize and manage an effective work plan to steer project activities, and develop a set of working relationships with the broader community team.