Lessons Learned and Affirmed

The Duke Endowment

*Children and Families Program*

*Report by the*
Institute for Families in Society
University of South Carolina

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

In 1997, The Duke Endowment launched the Children and Families Program, calling on communities to build partnerships that would imagine and enact new ways to meet the needs of children and families in their communities. Twelve Community Partnerships received grants and worked for four years to establish sustainable initiatives. The Endowment’s flexible approach to grantmaking fostered distinctive partnerships in each community. Though different, the partnerships have common elements in addition to their focus on children and families: they created multiple new services in each site, leveraged resources through partners’ participation, enhanced interagency communication, and inspired new expectations about community-building on behalf of children and youth.

In the Children and Families Program, community participants were encouraged to provide information about their experiences to technical assistants / coaches provided to them by The Duke Endowment. This report, “Lessons Learned and Affirmed,” includes new and revised insights as well as confirmation that the principles of collaboration established elsewhere applied here, too. The report does not attempt to cover all aspects of the four-year experience or to provide a comprehensive list of how to build and sustain a partnership. Rather, it emphasizes those major lessons that were shared across the communities and have general relevance.

The report is organized according to the three major themes of the partnership building experience: process, outcomes (effectiveness), and resource development.

The Partnership Process involved building spirit, membership, leadership, consumer participation, and structure. Partnership Effectiveness was grounded in organizational strengths related to planning, skilled program management, and evaluation capacity. Partnership Resource Development was affected by the foundation’s approach to grantmaking and the partnership’s capacity for sustainability. Tips on applying lessons on partnership process, effectiveness and resource development are offered here, supported by more detailed information in the full report.
The Partnership Process

Building Spirit
Keys to promoting a spirit of commitment to the partnership:
• Together, adopt visionary goals and affirm a sense of community.
• Take time to celebrate and affirm the work of the partnership.
• Regard the time devoted to building spirit and commitment as critical to the mission.
• Ask for concrete contributions from each partner to the partnership.

Building Membership
Keys to broad and sustained partnership participation:
• Establish “buy-in” and clearly define members’ roles.
• Prepare to manage conflict.
• Build on vested interests.
• Build on existing relations.
• When essential partners find it difficult to participate, the partnership should adapt to accommodate them.
• Plan for membership changes.

Building Consumer Participation
Keys to consumer involvement and leadership:
• Provide clear incentives and adequate resources to consumers to enable them to participate in the partnership.
• Educate partners about how to promote full inclusion of and leadership by consumers.
• Incorporate indicators of consumer participation into accountability measures.

Building Leadership
Keys to effective leadership include:
• Realize that effective leadership is an indispensable condition for an effective and lasting partnership.
• Articulate the leadership style that fits best with the partnership, identify or enlist the leader(s), and hold the leader accountable based on actions of the partnership.
• As the partnership evolves, adapt the leadership style to meet the changing needs of the partnership.
• Establish clear expectations of the partnership’s fiscal agent and discuss them openly within the partnership.

Building Structure
Keys to establishing a structure that fits the work of the partnership are:
• Create a mutually adopted organizational chart for the partnership and lines of authority that are clear to all partners.
• Establish clear partnership-staff expectations and lines of accountability.
• Resources, including time and staff, should be provided explicitly to the partnership, separate from the resources needed for partnership programs.

**Partnership Effectiveness**

**Practicing Skilled Interorganizational and Organizational Development**

Keys to effective partnership development include:

• Within the partnership, members practice skills in planning, managing, evaluating, and marketing the efforts of the partnership and developing resources to sustain it.
• Consistently affirm relations between the partnership’s designated staff and members of the partnership.
• Know when and how to choose and use specific technical assistance or help from community resources beyond the partnership.
• Maintain focus.

**Demonstrating Accountability**

Keys to demonstrating partnership accountability include:

• Build capacity for evaluation of the partnership and its sponsored programs.
• Take time to plan for lasting, effective change.
• Demonstrate tangible and intangible results to the partnership’s community.

**Summary: Partnership Resource Development**

**Promoting sustained resource development for the partnership:**

Keys to sustainability include:

• Define resources broadly.
• Start early.
• Maintain good balance between program development, partnership development, and resource development.
• Use external funds to seed programs that can feasibly be supported by local resources.
• Use external funds to support grant-writing and other forms of resource development.
• Avoid “putting all your eggs in one basket.”
Conclusion

Twelve communities responded to The Duke Endowment’s challenge to build a partnership that would improve the lives of children and families in their communities. They matched the investment of funds by TDE, an external entity, with their own local energy, skills, and resources. All the communities report that their local capacity for working together to plan and act for children and their families has been enhanced in specific, observable ways. All but one of the communities initiated new direct services.

None of the communities report that the work was easy. They built bridges across organizational, cultural, and personal boundaries to accomplish their common goals. They learned many new lessons and affirmed many old lessons about how to build and sustain effective community action.
LESSONS LEARNED AND AFFIRMED
The Duke Endowment Children and Families Program

BACKGROUND

In 1997, The Duke Endowment (TDE) launched the *Children and Families Program*, calling on communities to build partnerships that would imagine and enact new ways to meet the needs of children and families in their communities. Twelve Community Partnerships (see Table 1) received grants and worked for four years to establish sustainable initiatives. The Endowment’s flexible approach to grantmaking fostered distinctive partnerships in each community. Though different, the partnerships have common elements in addition to their focus on children and families: they created multiple new services in each site, leveraged resources through partners’ participation, enhanced interagency communication, and inspired new expectations about community-building on behalf of children and youth.

Promoting child and family well-being through community partnerships rather than simply creating new programs operated by beneficiary organizations led to opportunities and challenges. This report documents lessons learned and affirmed about building and sustaining community-based initiatives. The lessons are shared here for use by foundations that are contemplating the funding of similar efforts and for community groups that anticipate organizing themselves on behalf of children and families.

This report addresses the “nitty-gritty” facets of community capacity building for improved child and family well-being. American communities have long embraced the ideology of working together through coalitions, partnerships, networks, collaborations, community initiatives; many terms apply. While scholars may debate the fine points of what one term or another means, down home, in the communities, people know collaboration means getting together and building bridges across organizational, cultural, and personal boundaries to accomplish a common goal. In *The Duke Endowment Children and Families Program*, the broad goal was given: Improve the lives of children and their families. The specific goals emerged from the community. While each community was free to determine and develop its own project, all participating communities shared in the *Children and Families* process of organizing multiple organizations to address a common issue and including consumers in key leadership roles.

Community change, like all change, occurs through an iterative process. Ideology and VISION (values-based commitment) stimulate the process, information and KNOWLEDGE fuel it, ACTION produces change, and REFLECTION about the value of the change (evaluation) brings the process full circle. The process is neither automatic nor smooth. The ideology and vision may be there, but knowledge limited. Many guidebooks have been produced to inform the practice of community collaboration, and
substantial technical assistance is readily available. However, the community visionaries may not be fully aware of these resources, or awareness may not have led to understanding.

**Figure 1. The Process of Community Change**

Because working together involves many people, even shared vision, solid technical assistance, and plenty of “know-how” may not forge sustainable action. People still often repeat mistakes made in other communities overlooking helpful tips and lessons learned along the way. Thus, the process of action can sometimes be frustrating or off target. The long-term trust and relationships that are the spirit of sustained action can be slow in coming. People lose commitment. And reflective evaluation, in spite of many resources to help the process, still rarely occurs among community groups.

**Evaluation Method**

This Final Report of the University of South Carolina’s Institute for Families in Society (IFS) regarding The Duke Endowment *Children and Families Program* summarizes core findings about the program’s progress and outcomes after four years’ consultation.

The findings are grounded in a multi-method evaluation design that captured qualitative and quantitative information about the twelve partnerships. Using multiple methods creates validity by examining the partnerships from several different perspectives. When the sources at different perspectives concur regarding information about the programs, then validity of findings is confirmed. The data collected across the multiple methods for this report was highly consistent.
Focus of the evaluation. The evaluation examined several aspects of the *Children and Families Program*:

1. The partnerships as community coalitions;
2. The local programs supported by the partnerships;
3. The role of consultants (coaches) in support of the partnerships; and
4. The role of the grantmaker in support of the partnerships.

Data collection. Over the four years of the evaluation, different data collection methods were used to examine one or more aspects of the program. Eight of the partnerships, those with IFS consultants, were examined more closely than the other four.\(^1\) Data collection methods addressed the following:

1. Program evaluation is reported in the **organizational case studies** (2001-2002), and the **program profiles**.\(^2\) The case studies and the profiles are based, in part, on intensive reflection by partnership personnel and members, together with consultants, as they reviewed and interpreted data and impressions about the work of the partnership.

The twelve case studies are in-depth reports grounded in reports written by program personnel, reviews of program documents by the consultants, and interviews by consultants with the personnel and partners. The consultants then compiled the final case studies.

The program profiles are brief summaries of intensive work performed by the eight partnerships that were coached regarding how to build organizational evaluation capacity, using an empowerment evaluation approach. These evaluations focused on aspects of the partnership and the programs they support. Each partnership designed its own evaluation plan and information system, so the profiles are unique. For the final report, IFS developed profiles for the four partnerships that did not receive IFS coaching. These profiles were based on a review of partnership documents and reports and feedback from partnership members.

2. All twelve partnerships participated in the partnership **group member survey**, which captured standardized information across the partnerships through a mail-out questionnaire. The focus of the survey is on the partnership as a working group, or coalition. The surveys were conducted annually for three years for the eight IFS-coached partnerships and for two years for the other four partnerships with the exception of the Family Development Center project. The Family Development

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\(^1\) IFS coached the Davidson Partnership for Children and Families, the Family Development Center, the Hand in Hand Coalition, the North Carolina Fatherhood Initiative, the Northwest Crescent Center, Teens as Parents program, the Youth Center Task Force, and the Youth Empowerment Program.

\(^2\) Program profiles for the eight IFS-coached partnerships were updated semi-annually from grantees' reports and coaches' observations. The final case studies are provided as 11 reports because one of the grantees, Walltown Neighborhood Ministries, is included in the larger study on the Duke-Durham Neighborhood Partnership.
Center project had ended before the final year survey was distributed. The surveys elicited partners’ perceptions of their partnerships’ group functioning, effectiveness, and development through fixed choice items that produced quantifiable results and open-ended items that produced qualitative information. The data was analyzed using statistical and qualitative analysis techniques.

3. **Coaches’ observations** are based on four years’ experience as participant observers and consultants in the partnership development. Each coach infused observations into the final interpretation of the other information sources about the partnerships and the programs.

4. The development of the eight partnerships that received IFS coaching was affected by the coach’s participation, so a **coach’s survey** was designed to assess partnership personnel’s perceptions of the value of the coaching. The first evaluation survey was a simple, written survey that focused on coaches’ reliability, responsiveness and other qualities. It was sent to key contacts in partnerships after the first year of coaching. The final coach’s survey (2002) was conducted as a telephone interview with key partnership personnel. The survey asked grantees to assess benefits and difficulties with coaching and solicited advice to IFS and the Endowment regarding technical assistance for future initiatives. Respondents were also provided a written form with similar questions that they could complete and return directly to the Endowment if they wanted to share additional information that they did not feel comfortable sharing with the IFS interviewer.

5. Both the 2002 partnership survey and coach’s survey included a section on grantmaking. The **grantmaking assessment** gathered information about partners’ perceptions of The Duke Endowment’s role in their partnership development. The assessment yielded information about how the partners appreciated the foundation’s role and how they would recommend improvements in future grantmaking activity.

**Data analysis, interpretation, and reporting.** This final report is based on the integration of the various sources of information with regard to the four foci: partnerships, programs, coaches, and grantmakers.

Data interpretation is a critical part of the evaluation process. The coaches participated in numerous joint discussions about the data after it was analyzed or (in the case of qualitative data) compiled in annual evaluation team retreats and regular meetings. Conversations with TDE program officers were held periodically to gain multiple perspectives. Staffs of the various partnerships were consulted.

This report, “Lessons Learned and Affirmed,” is so titled because the conclusions from the review of the various sources of information revealed a number of lessons of use to future practice of partnership and community programs development. Some of these lessons are fresh; others affirm what is known to be good practice. All the findings derive directly from information gathered from the twelve partnerships in one of the several data collection methods.
The report does not attempt to cover all aspects of the four-year experience or to provide a comprehensive list of how to build and sustain a partnership. Rather, it emphasizes those major lessons that were shared across the communities and have general relevance. The report is written in a style that can guide future practice, based on the experience of these twelve partnerships.

TWELVE COMMUNITY PARTNERSHIPS

Approach

The *Children and Families Program* included twelve community partnerships. Several of the partnerships predated the initiative, in various forms. A couple of groups were providing services (funded or volunteer-based) and a couple of others were meeting informally to reflect on how to address the needs of particular groups in their communities. The Duke Endowment request for proposals (RFP) represented an opportunity for these groups to realize or expand their vision, including the involvement of new partners. For the majority of participating communities, partnerships developed more directly as a result of the funding announcement issued to TDE beneficiaries (i.e., those organizations that are eligible for Endowment funding and have an established relationship with the Endowment). The beneficiaries were challenged to create comprehensive community partnerships to address the highest priority needs of children and families, as determined by the partnership. In two cases the beneficiaries applied to expand pre-existing partnerships of which they were a part.

A beneficiary designated by The Duke Endowment to be the fiscal agent became the convening partner in the partnership process that began during grant proposal development. Consultants, provided by The Duke Endowment, gave technical assistance to the partnerships in the *Children and Families Program*. In some cases, the consultants were available during the planning process; in others, the community initiative was planned before the consultant was retained. The University of South Carolina Institute for Families in Society consulted to eight of the partnerships; two had individual consultants; and two had no consultants. IFS consultation was wide ranging including support for program planning and evaluation and for partnership development and management. At the outset, the Endowment stipulated that partnerships should be based in broad participation (including consumers), structure could not lead to the creation of new non profit organizations, and partners should strive to feel a spirit of community or connectedness.

The partnerships are listed in Table 1. More information about the partnerships can be found in *Children + Families: The Duke Endowment 2001 Annual Report*. 
Table 1. *Children and Families Program* Community Partnerships

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Group Name</th>
<th>Key Partners</th>
<th>Purpose</th>
<th>Technical Assistance</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| Duke-Durham Neighborhood Partnership           | • University  
• Neighborhood teen centers  
• Tutors and afterschool programs  
• Area public schools  
• Youth mentor program  
• Self-Help Credit Union | Redefine the relationship between the university and its surrounding neighborhood and promote child and youth development in the area. | No external technical assistance was provided or secured. |
| Communities Building Character                 | • Children’s home  
• Medical center  
• County school system  
• Cooperative extension services  
• Substance abuse treatment agency  
• Workforce development agency | Foster positive personal character for youth and promote development of responsible, caring citizens. | No external technical assistance was provided or secured. |
| Davidson Partnership for Children and Families | • Liberal arts college  
• Family support & child care center  
• Child care center  
• Boys & Girls Club  
• YMCA  
• Parks and recreation departments  
• Housing development organizations | Foster collaboration and trust to strengthen impact and effectiveness of child and family agencies; technical support for program development, fundraising and evaluation; transportation for partner services; placement of student volunteers. | IFS consultation provided from planning phase through initiative. |
| Family Development Center                      | • Community-based youth services organization  
• United Way  
• Community health partnership  
• Interfaith crisis assistance organization  
• Child care centers  
• Local industry  
• School district  
• Social service agencies | Create model multi-service family support and childcare facility. | IFS consultation provided from planning phase through initiative. |
| Hand in Hand Coalition                          | • United Methodist Church Conferences  
• Children’s homes  
• Community/School partnership organization  
• Department of Education | Provide social, educational, financial and spiritual support to children and their families through church-school partnerships. | IFS consultation provided from planning phase through initiative. |
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<tr>
<th>Group Name</th>
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<th>Purpose</th>
<th>Technical Assistance</th>
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</table>
| Healthy Foundations for Children    | • Regional hospital system  
• School district  
• Resource mothers program  
• Local television station | Foster positive parent-child interaction and increase participation in family support services.  
Foster positive parent-child interaction and increase participation in family support services. | No external technical assistance was provided or secured.                                            |
| N.C. Fatherhood Initiative          | • Residential Children’s Home  
• Community/School partnership organization  
• Family services center  
• School district  
• Health and social services departments  
• Local media | Promote strong father-child relations.  
Promote strong father-child relations.  
Promote strong father-child relations. | IFS consultation provided from planning phase through initiative. Additional evaluation support provided through local university. |
| Northwest Crescent Child Development and Family Services Center | • Liberal arts college  
• County school district  
• United Way Success by Six  
• County literacy association  
• Head Start  
• County hospital system  
• American Red Cross  
• Private hospital system  
• County public health dept.  
• Free medical clinic  
• Family health care services | Provide comprehensive child development, family literacy, senior services, health services, and other family supports at a community-based comprehensive center.  
Provide comprehensive child development, family literacy, senior services, health services, and other family supports at a community-based comprehensive center.  
Provide comprehensive child development, family literacy, senior services, health services, and other family supports at a community-based comprehensive center. | IFS consultation provided from planning phase through initiative. Furman University, lead agency and partner, provided evaluation consultation in the first two years of the program. |
| Teens as Parents                    | • Regional hospital system  
• County health department  
• Cooperative extension service  
• County mental health  
• County social services  
• Technical college  
• Faith community | Prevent second teen pregnancies and promote the well-being of teen parents and their children.  
Prevent second teen pregnancies and promote the well-being of teen parents and their children.  
Prevent second teen pregnancies and promote the well-being of teen parents and their children. | IFS provided consultation from the second year through the initiative. An external evaluation consultant worked with the program in the first year. |
| Youth Center Task Force             | • Regional hospital system  
• Middle school youth  
• County parks & recreation  
• School district  
• Cooperative Extension/4-H  
• Juvenile justice/court system | Provide safe, structured, supervised, enriching activities that are accessible to youth throughout the county.  
Provide safe, structured, supervised, enriching activities that are accessible to youth throughout the county.  
Provide safe, structured, supervised, enriching activities that are accessible to youth throughout the county. | IFS consultation provided from planning phase through initiative. |
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<tr>
<th>Group Name</th>
<th>Key Partners</th>
<th>Purpose</th>
<th>Technical Assistance</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Department of social services</td>
<td>Longer-range goal: assess feasibility and develop a permanent facility for youth and family activities.</td>
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<td></td>
<td>• Liberal arts college</td>
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<td></td>
<td>• City government</td>
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<td></td>
<td>• County government</td>
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<td></td>
<td>• Chamber of Commerce</td>
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<td></td>
<td>• Family practice center</td>
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<td></td>
<td>• Arts council</td>
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<td>• Housing authority</td>
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<td></td>
<td>• Smart Start</td>
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<td></td>
<td>• Local churches</td>
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<td></td>
<td>• Psychiatric service for children</td>
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<tr>
<td>Youth Empowerment Project (YEP)</td>
<td>• Local church</td>
<td>Empower at-risk youth to overcome their adverse circumstances and succeed in life.</td>
<td>IFS consultation provided from planning phase through initiative.</td>
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<td></td>
<td>• Local Christian camp</td>
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<td></td>
<td>• School district</td>
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<td></td>
<td>• Local foundation</td>
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<tr>
<td>Walltown Neighborhood Ministries</td>
<td>• University</td>
<td>Revitalize the neighborhood, make it drug-free and safe, build youth-elderly relations, and improve housing.</td>
<td>A private consultant provided program planning, evaluation and partnership development support through the initiative.</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Local church</td>
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<td></td>
<td>• Community development corporation</td>
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<td></td>
<td>• Faith based housing developer</td>
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<td>• City</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Neighborhood ministry</td>
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<td></td>
<td>• State housing finance agency</td>
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<td></td>
<td>• United Way partnership</td>
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THE PARTNERSHIP BUILDING EXPERIENCE

The lessons from the Children and Families Program are organized according to the three major themes of the partnership building experience: process, outcomes, and resource development.

The Partnership Process refers to the effort to create a community planning entity to respond the children and family needs. It involved building spirit, membership, leadership, consumer participation, and structure. Partnership Effectiveness refers to the effort to create new or enhance existing services to fill gaps in the community support for children and families. Effectiveness was grounded in organizational strengths related to planning, skilled program management, and evaluation capacity. Partnership Resource Development refers to the capacity to establish a resource base to continue the work of the partnership (both programs and planning). It was affected by the foundation’s approach to grantmaking and the partnership’s capacity for sustainability.

The Partnership Process

Building Spirit

In the Children and Families Program, effective partnerships exude a spirit of commitment to working together. Their partnership is more than just another work group. The members share common values and appear to enjoy being in one another’s company. Their interaction addresses more than the work of the group; they clearly share a common commitment to the community in which they live and/or work. They can articulate the mission of the partnership and believe that without the partnership, the mission cannot be accomplished.

The spirit of the partnership can be contagious. When asked what she felt about her experience in the partnership, one partner observed that it gave her a “feeling of collaboration, problem-solving, progress, HOPE!”

Keys to promoting a spirit of commitment to the partnership:

- Together, adopt visionary goals and affirm a sense of community.

The partnership can act affirmatively to promote such a spirit. When all members feel they have contributed to development of the common goal and understand their parts in working to achieve the goal, they are more likely to participate actively. Expressing common values and affirming their connectedness to the community help to create the bonds that form the basis of partnership spirit. Periodically revisiting the vision and mission to affirm direction or acknowledge change helps sustain the spirit of the partnership. Children and Families partnerships reviewed
these key statements often after expanding members or in the process of strategic planning.

**Building relationships and trust and sharing power among community leaders**

Through one partnership, community leaders worked together regularly over extended time to enhance opportunities for youth in a rural and resource-poor county. Together, the leaders developed processes for sharing resources and knowledge of each other’s systems and potential opportunities. Agency and organizational leaders, planners, administrators, elected officials from county government, and business leaders have a history together now – they know each other and relate openly about differences and challenges.

Their focus on afterschool programs through the Children and Families Program laid the foundation for the county school district to apply for and receive a multi-million dollar 21st Century learning grant. A persistent group, they have never forgotten their original long-term goal of creating a physical facility (community center) for youth and families. As the Duke Endowment funding ends, it appears that the partnership’s efforts may be coming to fruition. A local corporate funder has been found, county council and planners have given approval, and donated land has been arranged. The County Parks and Recreation Department will become the tenant and related youth organizations will share the space to provide opportunities for county families.

- **Take time to celebrate and affirm the work of the partnership.**

These celebrations range in form from quick sharing-time at meetings to elaborate community fests. Significantly, planning these events so that they emphasize real progress, rather than simply feeling good about being together (which is also good to express), helps inspire the spirit. Groups with a passion for children tend to want to work hard and play hard, so affirming their need for play will strengthen the partnership.

The grantor can reinforce the importance of celebration. In the *Children and Families Program*, partnerships were convened annually to share progress. Participants were grateful for the opportunity to affirm the work of the initiative and appreciated opportunities for peer support and additional training offered at the conferences.

Early successes help to rally partnership morale. In most sites of the *Children and Families Program*, work focused right away on establishing services or resources to address unmet needs. In some cases, unfortunately, these efforts detracted focus from building the partnership itself.
Regard the time devoted to building spirit and commitment as critical to the mission. Children and Families Program partners frequently expressed surprise at how much work partnership development required. As one partner observed, “It would have been helpful to know early how complicated and time consuming it is to pull this type of thing together.” Partners in collaborations are typically devoted to their work with children and families. They sometimes fear that building a partnership will detract from their service, rather than recognizing that taking time to get to know one another can lead to long-term gains for the children. People in the business sector practice a variation of this maxim; they ground their work in relationships and take time to nurture those relationships. A couple of the Children and Families partnerships continue to resist putting energy into partnership development but members in most of the partnerships express an appreciation for both the work and benefits of relationship building. They cite benefits such as “fellowship,” “meeting and relationship building with a diverse group of people” and “the incredible power of collaborative relationships” as among the most significant ways their participation in the Initiative has affected them.

In children’s services follow this maxim of professional service: “Take care of the caregivers and they will take care of the children.”

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**Celebrating Milestones**

One partnership that focused on secondary teen pregnancy prevention had difficulty obtaining volunteers and resources from the community due to negative perceptions about teens who become pregnant. In addition, the partnership’s program provided intense home visiting to teen parents, but the home visitors experienced frequent burnout. Creative problem solving among partnership and staff members resulted in an effective way to reduce both barriers - a regular celebration of their success stories. The program now holds a graduation ceremony twice a year for participants who are no longer in need of formal support services.

The young parents typically graduate after two years. These graduations are important events for partnership members, the program staff, and all program participants as a joyous acknowledgement of the program’s success and the teens’ hard work. Community leaders are invited to the celebrations as a way to increase awareness of the program and the needs of teen parents. Selected graduates tell the audience their “stories” and the effects of the program on them, often bringing tears to the eyes of the staff as well as the community leaders. Increased political support for the program has resulted from these celebrations, as well as volunteered time and financial contributions from the greater community.
• Ask for concrete contributions from each partner to the partnership.

Children and Families Partnership members contributed a variety of resources including staff to work on the partnership (with clear indications they were freed from other responsibilities), space and equipment, funds or in-kind goods or services. Such demonstrations of commitment are signs that the partnership has spirit and the potential for sustainability.

Building Membership

Across the initiative, partnerships set out to recruit broad representation from their communities. Given that each partnership had a different focus, primary partner organizations varied. Overall, strongest representation has been from agencies serving youth and families, educational programs, and health care organizations. A few partnerships have high participation from the business and faith communities but most partnerships have not integrated them. While schools are critical players in programs serving youth, several of the partnerships struggled to secure full participation from schools.

Based on the experience of these partnerships, keys to effective broad and sustained participation include the following:

• Establish “buy-in” and clearly define members’ roles.

All members of the partnership should have a clear understanding of what the other partners expect of them individually as well as what the partnership as a group aims to do. This is best accomplished by written agreements and periodic review of the agreements.

The stronger partnerships have adopted several roles for the partnership as a group including: program planning (continuing to identify and implement objectives that fulfill the partnership’s vision for the community); program development (establishing innovations); accountability (ensuring fiscal accountability and program effectiveness); and sustainability (developing and implementing a strategy to sustain the programs and the partnership).

Stronger partnerships also have clearly stated expectations regarding contributions from members (e.g., staff, in-kind and financial support), mutual accountability (reporting of financial and program data), and interorganizational accountability (i.e., clarity about how staff who are partners balance accountability to their home organization and the partnership). Many of the partnerships struggled with one or more of these issues early in their development; in some cases, the difficulties persisted.

Partners need early training in partnership development and should be asked to articulate goals and objectives for the partnership as well as for partner participation. Participating organizations could be asked at the onset to “buy in,” that is, to
articulate the contribution they bring to the partnership in terms of resources (such as personnel time, skills, funds, space, materials).

As the partnership evolves, this commitment should be formalized through memoranda of agreement (MOAs). While a couple of partnerships developed MOAs early (to secure buy-in from potential partners that were leery of an open-ended commitment or to resolve conflict), most developed them later in the partnership process. For some the MOAs required extensive negotiation.

Partnerships should not rush to develop MOAs; rather, they should emerge from solid relationships built by working to clarify how each partner will participate. Over time, these commitments (MOAs) should be reviewed and reaffirmed or revised.

- **Prepare to manage conflict.**
  
  If you have recruited diverse members of the community, you will have conflict. Diverse, relevant perspectives strengthen a partnership. Conflict can be a sign that you are getting to the heart of matters such as turfism and resource sharing. When managed well, conflict can help clarify the role of the partnership. In the *Children and Families Program*, a couple of partnerships have benefited from intentional management of conflict that emerged typically over issues of control, program selection, and accountability. The partnerships used extended meetings, retreats, and consultation to directly address the conflicts.

  Many resources, such as web-based information, the wisdom of experienced community members, and skilled consultation, can be tapped to help partnerships address their conflicts. From the beginning, a partnership should acknowledge that it will have conflict and develop a plan for how to address it.

- **Build on vested interests.**
  
  Generally people participate in coalitions because their organizations will gain something while they are contributing to a greater good that cannot be accomplished without mutual cooperation. In most *Children and Families Program* partnerships, several of the participating organizations received funds to create programs. Both the partnership and the funded programs required start-up energy and resources from members, straining resources as the two efforts vied for attention. After four years, most *Children and Families* groups are looking to sustain their partnership as well as the programs. These sites worked to clarify the relationship of individual partners to the partnership. Some of them continue to envision a planning role for the partnership; others look to the partnership for training or assistance with fundraising. A couple of the partnerships in the *Children and Families Program* lost focus on the role of the partnership after programs were implemented. These programs now operate independently of any support or participation from a partnership group, and the partnership as a distinct entity has waned.
Accept that each partner needs an incentive for maintaining involvement in the partnership that goes beyond feeling good about advancing community interests. Partners have limited time to invest, and must believe, over time, that they will see a return on time invested. Partnerships must build on the vested interests of the partners, which often are about program development, while promoting sustenance of the partnership itself.

- **Build on existing relations.**

  The building blocks of partnerships are the relationships people have with one another. People tend to align with familiar others. Gather together people who already know one another and add new partners to this core with careful facilitation, to help them feel full ownership.

Most of the *Children and Families Program* partnerships were started by people who had personal or professional affiliations with one another that were independent of their mutual interest in forming the *Children and Families Program* partnership. These affiliations included being members and leaders of the same church, consumers of services at agencies invited to join the partnership (e.g. parent of child in child care center or youth program), spouses who served as staff or volunteers in partner agencies, or colleagues at different organizations working together on other community projects. These relationships tended to occur among people who were vested in the community and who had been there and would be there for extended time. Such pre-existing relationships can offer a solid foundation upon which collaboration occurs.

While many of the partnerships benefited from professional and social networks of the members, those relations that build trust among the insiders can also make it harder for those outside the circle to participate. If a core group of the partnership interacts professionally and socially, they have opportunities to discuss issues and make partnership decisions that exclude others. This works against consumer participation and diversity in general because it requires people leave their comfort zone of familiar interaction to build relations with people who are different from them.

- **When essential partners find it difficult to participate, the partnership should adapt to accommodate them.**

  For example, many partnerships struggled to keep school representatives actively involved, even though the initiatives were about children and youth. School leaders face many demands on their time and must prioritize. Meeting at the school or after the children are gone works in some cases. Similarly, business leaders often prefer early morning meetings. Faith community leaders tend to be heavily occupied with evening meetings and prefer daytimes. Partnerships must assess their participation needs and work to include the most critical members.

- **Plan for membership changes.**

  All partnerships experience some turnover in membership, which is normal for groups that have been operating for at least three years. Member changes can
strengthen a partnership if the transition is managed well. Partnerships need ways to orient new members and support their full inclusion. *Children and Families Program* partnerships lost members for predictable reasons including personal health or family reasons, changes in employment or job position, or a waning interest. Others gained membership because they increased the breadth and diversity of issues they would address (one partnership started with four organizational members and grew to eleven members).

While changes in membership vary across the partnerships, turnover appears to be lower in those partnerships that are actively working to develop the partnership by creating an organizational structure, clarifying the role of the partnership and its mission, or clarifying roles within the partnership. In contrast, the turnover in one partnership that has not defined its role was 60% in one year.

Partnerships periodically change or add members because the needs for particular skills and representation change as the partnership evolves. Several *Children and Families Program* partnerships recruited members to fill gaps in skills, particularly fundraising. In some cases, early membership profiles included heavy representation by program personnel, whereas later, the partnership included proportionately more people who can influence policy changes or resource development.

Finally, partnerships have lost members due to conflict over program policies (e.g., whether to serve gay youth should the need arise) or particular interventions (e.g., the use of a particular method to assess youth needs). In these cases, the interests of the broader community should be served by avoiding a hostile split. An amicable parting and an agreement to disagree while acknowledging the different positions can model respect and tolerance within the child and family services community.

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**“P” is for Patience**

*It is essential that new groups have time to develop their partnerships. Community leaders responding to funders requests for proposals often are motivated by the opportunity to improve or create new services or strategies to meet the needs of their communities. While they may understand the stipulation to “collaborate” as a means to an end, they less often understand the resources (time, funding, skills and staff) required by the partnership itself. Like members of many other new collaboratives, Children and Families Partnership members tended to focus on programs first, rather than developing the capacity of the partnership itself. Reflecting on the experience four years into the initiative, many partnership members recognized the need to build the partnership before developing programs. Some offered specific advice to those contemplating new collaborative efforts:**

- Allow sufficient time for relationship building and capacity building before expecting specific results.
- Prepare for a long-term commitment.
- Devote more time to planning partnerships and facilitating collaboration.
- Design the process as a five-year process and expect difficulties.
- Recognize that three years (sounds long) is very short for this type of systemic change...
Building Consumer Participation

In the *Children and Families Program*, few partnerships have realized the goal of welcoming and supporting the participation of consumers or program participants. The Endowment clearly established an expectation that consumer participation was a high priority and provided training and information about the significance of consumers’ roles for healthy partnerships and programs; yet few operationalized this expectation. The exceptions include a) two partnerships that recruited youth to advise or serve on the board of the partnership and b) one partnership that has fostered the skill development of a parent who is expected to assume a leadership role.

Many of the lessons about consumer participation and leadership in the *Children and Families Program* affirm what family support advocates have long promoted:

- Provide clear incentives and adequate resources that enable them to participate for consumers in the partnership.
  
  Incentives for consumers to participate are often unclear. Agency representatives who joined partnerships could articulate that they agreed to participate because of a relationship with the Endowment, another partner organization, potential funding, or their desire to expand their outreach to children or families in their communities. Consumers of child and family services tend to be focused on achieving immediate support for their needs, and they reach out on behalf of others in relation to the needs of their own children. This perspective makes them valuable and essential contributors to decisions about program planning and effective practices.

  The cost of partnership participation often cannot be borne by consumers without help. While many partners come to the table while being paid by their agencies or because they have relative affluence, most consumers do not share such privilege, and may incur concrete costs such as child care or transportation in order to participate. Award of stipends, provision of child care and transportation benefits, or provision of meals can free consumers to do their share. This may require flexibility. For example, to promote senior citizen involvement in governance of a family services center, one partnership provided dog-sitting services so that an elder could travel to an overnight meeting on behalf of the partnership.

- Educate partners about how to promote full inclusion of and leadership by consumers.
  
  Often, the majority of partners do not understand the value of consumer participation. They get the message that consumers should “be at the table” but the role of the consumer in the partnership and program development is unclear. Involving consumers can enlighten partners and community members. As one partner observed about youth participation in the partnership, the experience gave her “much greater awareness of youth as individuals/citizens deserving interest and respect and acknowledgement.“ While most *Children and Families Program* partnerships have not integrated consumers into their partnerships, final reflections of partnership members suggest that some at least now better understand the value
of consumer participation. When asked about how to improve their partnership's effectiveness, many respondents expressed a desire or need to bring neighborhood members, non-professionals, community representatives, parents and others into the partnership.

Integrating consumers into active partnership roles requires creativity and flexibility. Those in the *Children and Families Program* that were successful went to some lengths to facilitate youth participation including meeting in the evenings, arranging transportation, reminding them often of the meetings, and, importantly, helping them understand the process, translating professional jargon, and providing leadership training.

The Endowment provided training on consumer participation but it may have been helpful to provide it earlier in the planning of the partnerships. In addition to offering education and training on incorporating consumers into the *Children and Families Program* partnerships, the grantor tried to reinforce the value of the process by modeling "consumer participation." Endowment staff and consultants organized two annual conferences for Initiative grantees but invited grantees to participate in planning for the third. The grantees provided new ideas and offered to do more work in preparation for the conference than the planners would ever have requested from grantees.

It takes time and work to support the participation by consumers who have never been on boards or managed programs. Some partnership members may be reluctant or uncomfortable to provide training or orientation that meets the different needs of consumers or people inexperienced in the process. It is possible that the stronger inclination to work with youth reflects a greater comfort level providing training or empowering youth rather than other adults.

- **Incorporate indicators of consumer participation into accountability measures.**

  Grantmakers or community leaders can increase the probability of consumer involvement by articulating and supporting process or impact outcomes for consumer participation, e.g., requiring their participation in meetings, asking partnerships to describe how consumers were oriented to the process, explaining how consumers provided leadership, and including line items on the budget worksheet for consumer participation incentives or for travel and consumer training.
Building Leadership

Perhaps it is a truism to say that effective leadership is an indispensable requirement for an effective and lasting partnership. In the Children and Families Program, various partnerships relied on different leadership styles. Some were guided by a single inspirational person who indirectly made most decisions; others looked to a facilitative leader who attended to the needs of various members as decisions were made; and others dissected leadership responsibilities and kept a balance of power. Those partnerships that achieved sustainability generally had leaders who, regardless of style, could mobilize others to act.

The key seems to be for the partnership to:

- Articulate the leadership style that fits best with the partnership, identify or enlist the leader(s), and hold the leader(s) accountable based on actions of the partnership.

Some partnerships were born of the inspired ideas of a certain leader, who helped facilitate the partnership’s progress. These leaders were charismatic or well networked or simply enthusiastic. All could articulate a vision for the community and inspire others to participate. Other effective leaders emerged from within the groups. Their skills were developed or recognized over time. Partnerships were stronger when they could openly discuss leadership issues and could effectively hold leaders (as well as members) accountable for their expected roles. They often addressed accountability in simple ways, by social influence exercised in one-on-one conversations with the leader.

The lessons learned about leadership in the Children and Families Program also stemmed from negative experiences. When asked to reflect on their four-year experience, a number of partnership members noted poor or uneven leadership as an obstacle to early partnership development. Some of the responses note that the problem has been solved but inactive partnerships still lack effective leadership. The leader (typically a representative of the fiscal agency) may have chosen not to

Bringing in Consumers

A partnership worked hard to include youth. Initially, the resource and needs assessment included youth in middle school youth focus groups. With assistance from local schools, the partnership recruited some of these youth to participate further in their planning sessions. The partnership changed meeting times to accommodate school schedules, provided transportation to and from the meetings, and, with cooperation of school guidance counselors, reminded students of meetings. Eventually the partnership sponsored a youth leadership club to provide youth an opportunity to participate in county council meetings, practice public speaking, and meet with community leaders. Youth were recruited from across the community including through the local juvenile justice office.
develop the partnership (too busy) or was absent over a period of time. In one case, the partnership created new programs, but the program staff diminished the value and role of the partnership. Most members of a third partnership failed to understand their role as a board and have been slow to respond to staff efforts at board development.

- **As the partnership evolves, adapt the leadership style to meet the changing needs of the partnership.**

  The kind of leadership needed in the partnership changes over time. In the *Children and Families Program*, many partnerships benefited from visionary leaders who initiated the project but then relied on leaders with implementation skills after the program was funded. Sometimes the partnerships need different kinds of leadership at the same time, for example, someone to manage current programs and someone to continue to envision how to meet the needs of the community. Partnerships tended to develop more evenly when there was capacity to share leadership, for example, when staff managed programs and partnership members attended to the partnership. Even with dynamic leaders, it is a tremendous challenge to plan, manage programs, network, fundraise, report to funders and perform other activities. When confronted with this array of tasks, it is not unusual for a leader attempting to wear too many hats to neglect either the programs or partnership.

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**Leadership: Changing Needs at Different Stages**

One partnership has benefited from different leadership styles and capacities over its development. The original convener of the group, an upper level administrator with the lead agency, led the early stages of partnership development. Her authority and vision helped the group work through early frustration as they identified the right partners and developed focus. Her decision to respond to The Duke Endowment Children and Families funding announcement provided impetus to the project. She was an active participant through the planning effort but recognized she was too busy to coordinate the effort once it took shape and asked a mid level manager to take over. The second leader had strong administrative skills and did an excellent job managing staff (in concert with her counterpart at a partner agency) and coordinating board activities. Eventually, the board developed sufficient structure and capacity to identify leadership from among its other members and the current board chair is from outside the lead agency.

In contrast, other partnerships have struggled to sustain leadership. In one partnership, initial leadership was provided by a mid-level person from the lead agency / fiscal agent. He had a vision for the community and worked hard to secure participation of stakeholders through a difficult planning process. Unfortunately, health problems prevented this motivational leader from continuing as chair after funding allowed the partnership to hire staff. The new leadership was less engaged in the initiative and did not represent the fiscal agent. New leadership advised but did not supervise staff, which focused on programs at the expense of the partnership. Participation dropped off and the partnership never developed into a governing or planning body with the capacity to sustain the partnership or guide future collaborative responses to the needs of children and their families.
The partnerships discovered that leadership of any kind is difficult to sustain. Effective partnerships recognize the need to involve multiple people in leadership so the partnership is not overly dependent on a few people.

- **Establish clear expectations of the partnership’s fiscal agent and discuss them openly within the partnership.**

  In the *Children and Families Program*, leadership issues were complicated by the fact that the Endowment had to designate an organization in each site as the partnership’s fiscal agent, which gave that organization influence and power. Such a process is typical in any funder’s award of grants to community initiatives; fiscal accountability is smoother if delegated to one source.

The way the fiscal agent interpreted its role was important to the success of the partnerships. Some fiscal agents shared leadership and did not dominate the process. Others deliberately assumed a facilitative, “back-seat” role. Others exerted strong influence over the process, albeit subtly, which diminished the role of other partners. Some fiscal agents struggled with liability issues and some were uneasy with a lack of control over the activities they were funding through other partners, particularly in program areas outside of the lead agency’s expertise. Some fiscal agents contributed significant in-kind or financial resources to the success of the partnerships above and beyond the resources made available by the Endowment. Some fiscal agents feared a loss of standing with the funder if the partnership failed, and that it would jeopardize future funding for other projects.

### Reaction to Lead Agency’s Power

*Two partnerships, each with a hospital serving as the fiscal agent, had different opinions about the use of power by the fiscal agent. One partnership found the hospital/fiscal agent to be extremely flexible and able to assist the partnership with creative use of money because the hospital had few obstacles in hiring and reimbursement policies and procedures.*

*By contrast, the other partnership felt that their program and staff suffered from the rigid policies and perspective of its hospital/fiscal agent. For example, the program’s outreach workers had difficulty getting reimbursed for travel even though the program provided home visitation and the home visitors used their personal cars to make home visits. In addition, the staff had to deny this service to clients who lived in isolated areas of the county because the hospital limited the distance for which the workers could be reimbursed.*

*It seems that the partnership’s perspective on the power of the fiscal agent as positive or negative is significantly determined by the flexibility of the fiscal agent in funding matters and the degree to which the agent’s representative to the partnership embraces true collaboration.*
Building Structure

Form follows function, thus the structure of the partnerships in the Children and Families Program vary according to the nature of the work the partnerships adopted. Structure of the partnerships include the lines of authority with the partnership (e.g. among various members and among the chair, fiscal agent, and members), between the partnership board and the staff, and among the partnership and various programs, particularly those created or supported by the partnership.

From this experience, **keys to building structure that best fits the partnership’s functions:**

- Create a mutually adopted organizational chart for the partnership and lines of authority that are clear to all partners.

  In the *Children and Families Program*, three partnerships that adopted community planning and program development as a goal work collaboratively to share decision-making, planning, and pursuit of resources. They tend to have high levels of trust and have overcome turf issues. A few partnerships function as advisory boards to specific new programs funded by partnership resources, supporting staff when needed but not driving policy. Two partnerships have become hubs for extended networks of community resources focused on particular issues. A few of the partnerships are barely operating, even though they created new programs. Typically they have not clarified a role for the partnership itself that is distinct from the roles of specific partner organizations. Clearly all of the local communities responded to the opportunity to develop or expand services, but all of them did not embrace the opportunity to develop a partnership that would continue to envision how to meet the needs of children and families.

  A clear organizational chart and clearly articulated lines of authority help to clarify relations among partners, programs, and staff. The chart and lines should be openly discussed by partners and mutually adopted.

  Some of the partnerships in the *Children and Families Program* struggled with additional structural issues. The Endowment discouraged Children and Families partnerships from incorporating into new nonprofit organizations. Once they started to address sustainability, however, some of the programs felt compelled to organize as nonprofit organizations in order to overcome funding restrictions. For example, one church-based partnership incorporated in order to keep program funds separate from the church accounts. At least two other partnerships explored the option as they planned for sustainability.

  - Establish clear partnership-staff expectations and lines of accountability.

    The relationship of the partnership to its staff also requires clarification. In most of the partnerships, once staff was hired, the partnership significantly reduced its role. These partnerships in the *Children and Families Program* were eager to meet critical community needs, so they tended to allocate their resources for program staff that
were expected also to facilitate the partnership. Typically, the staff regards its role to be program management and neglects partnership development. Exceptions include a partnership that hired coordinating staff for the partnership itself and another that delegates programming to staff but provides leadership to partnership development.

- Resources, including time and staff, should be provided explicitly to the partnership, separate from the resources needed for partnership programs. Importantly, these resources should not compete with or draw away from programs. Grantees should create distinct budgets for programs sponsored by the partnership and the partnership itself.

### Partnership Effectiveness

A partnership’s effectiveness generally lies in three areas: 1) the community’s enhanced capacity to respond to evolving child and family needs, now and in the future; 2) enhanced policies, programs, or systems, and/or 3) improved outcomes for children and families. The partnership’s effectiveness, as distinct from the effectiveness of any policies or programs instigated by the partnership, derives from the partners’ skills in building the capacity for the partnership to work as a formal or informal organization. In the *Children and Families Program*, partnerships that are moving toward sustainability after the end of the Endowment funding have more of these organizational capacity building skills than those that are unlikely to survive.

As noted, the value of a partnership lies in its ability to initiate sustained community change. Generally, change is measured in terms of enhanced resources for children and families, most often in the form of programs that can show results.

The **keys to effective partnerships** appear to be:

### Practicing Skilled Interorganizational and Organizational Development

- **Within the partnership, members practice skills in planning, managing, evaluating, and marketing the efforts of the partnership and developing resources to sustain it.**

  Ideally, each partner can share a skill or contribute to mutual practice of the skills essential for teamwork and goal attainment. If partners do not possess these skills, and in many resource-poor areas they do not, then training and skill development in these areas should be sought and provided to all partners. These skills include

  - **Leadership:** This includes each member knowing how to relate to a designated leader and how to hold the leader accountable, as well as leaders exercising skill, as noted in the section on leadership. Training in board development and board-executive staff relations can help partners acquire or enhance these skills. Some partners initiated board development training; others resisted it even when coaches recommended it.
o **Planning:** The group needs to know how to establish common vision, mission, goals and objectives and, significantly, to act according to the plan. While coaches typically facilitated early discussions of mission and vision, several partnerships revisited the issues when the goals changed or the partnership expanded.

o **Managing:** Essential skills include group facilitation and decision-making (including at meetings and in between); efficiently accomplishing tasks; holding one another accountable; managing information, communications, and conflict; monitoring quality; maximizing participation, and other skills for smooth operations of the partnership. A special skill is the capacity to manage interorganizational relations.

o **Evaluating:** Together, groups that monitor and reflect upon their progress and make corrections for more effective results are likely to have more impact. They use standards for assessing their progress that are grounded in a logic model or evaluation plan with clear objectives.

o **Marketing:** Community-based groups need to maintain strong ties to their communities by keeping them informed of the partnership’s progress. Marketing, along with the other skills noted above, is the basis for resource development and sustaining support. Several of the partnerships recruited people with media contacts and skills (e.g. from local television or radio stations) to promote the partnership and programs. Others used resources of member partners (e.g. newsletters, public relations staff) to market the program.

o **Resource development:** Community groups must build the type of relationships that lead to sustained financial and volunteer support and support the effort through technical skills such as grant-writing and business planning. While several of the partnerships continue to struggle to sustain their efforts, one partnership addressed the issue directly. Programs they developed with TDE funds were absorbed by member organizations and the partnership used final year “carryover” funds, to hire a half-time resource developer focus on researching and pursuing funds to realize the original dream of the partnership - building a youth center.

- **Consistently affirm relations between the partnership’s designated staff and members of the partnership.**

  Strong board-staff relations are critical whether the staff is donated by a partner organization or supported by partnership resources. Partners often rely too heavily on staff to provide the required capacities rather than contributing them from their agencies or themselves. This makes the effectiveness of the partnership vulnerable to staff turnover. Loss of a strong partnership coordinator who has worked independently can devastate a partnership.

  Staff turnover has been a problem for many partnerships. In some cases, staff commitment was affected by poor communication among partners or lack of direction from the partnership. Staff can take the brunt of the stress when the
partnership is dealing with poorly managed conflict. Staff turnover may be related to sustainability - staff may have a difficult time committing to a project when the security of the project is in doubt due to funding. Staff turnover may also be related to overload - many are required to manage new programs sponsored by the partnership while also coordinating the partnership.

As noted earlier, strong staff-partnership relations are grounded in clear definition, of roles and responsibilities for the staff and partnership members, open, positive communication, and mutual accountability.

• Know when and how to choose and use specific technical assistance or help from community resources beyond the partnership.

In the *Children and Families Program*, eight partnerships had an organizational coach available for a few hours a week to help guide the partnership toward results. Some partnerships accessed outside expertise when their own partnerships lacked particular skills including community assessments, proposal writing, fundraising, and evaluation. Those that could appropriately seek help, build relations to maximize use of the helper’s resources, and hold the helper accountable were most effective.

**Using local resources to enhance capacity**

*One partnership developed a strong collaborative relationship with faculty at a nearby university for evaluation support. Faculty advise the partnership staff about program content (e.g. effective practices research) and evaluation strategies. The university provides student research interns to help implement the evaluation by collecting and analyzing data. The partnership staff and faculty have collaborated on proposals to expand its programs across the state. Additional collaboration to sponsor a conference is planned.*

• Maintain focus.

Partnerships can be tempted to take on too much, too fast. In the *Children and Families Program*, partnerships struggled when they implemented a wide variety of programs to try to reach a range of participants, grew too fast in response to overwhelming interest or initiated large expensive projects with long development time lines. Good planning leads to focused action. In the words of one partner member offering advice to groups embarking on the partnership experience, “Start small, start slow.”
Demonstrating Accountability

- Build capacity for evaluation of the partnership and its sponsored programs.

A partnership or organization with evaluation capacity can continuously assess its progress and incorporate evaluation activities into its routine activities. Continuous evaluation requires reflective communication and strengthens the connectedness of the partnership because it feeds the process for community change. Periodic, “how are we doing” discussions provide opportunities to review partnership development (do we have the right members, adequate resources, financial controls, the “right” contacts), processes (how are decisions made, who provides leadership, are people comfortable participating), skills, (do we have people with or access to marketing, fundraising, writing skills) and direction (do we have a strategic plan) and to make changes as needed. Few partnerships consistently show capacity for this evaluation or reflection but several have used planning retreats to think about these questions. One partnership invited an outside evaluation of the partnership early in its development and has used the assessment to guide regular planning sessions and to mark progress in its development.

Some of the individual programs of the partnerships have worked hard to develop their own evaluation capacity but many have struggled with this program component. Community practitioners whose primary interest is client service often perceive that evaluation skills are hard to learn and practice.

The partnerships should provide training and support to equip themselves with evaluation skills and suitable tools and reduce resistance to evaluation. In particular, valid, feasible, inexpensive, culturally relevant measures can be difficult to find for community-based programs. An assessment of the Children and Families Program evaluation process indicates that, in spite of the difficulties, partners in most sites report improved appreciation for evaluation. For example, some programs report that their experience with evaluation helps them clarify program goals in and outside of the TDE initiative.

Another key step in evaluation capacity building: Incorporate an evaluation plan into the budget. Evaluation requires resources, such as capacity for careful record keeping, skill in tabulating and presenting information, and time for evaluative reflection. Partnerships rarely commit sufficient resources (primarily staff time) to evaluation. In the Children and Families Program, most partnerships had evaluation coaches (through IFS and or through local resources), but the partnerships varied in the commitment of their own resources to the process.


**Evaluation Success**

A program that provides home visiting and related services to teen parents has demonstrated unusual success at building capacity for evaluation. The program and partnership both have been stable over the life of the grant; thus, several people consistently have participated in the evaluation. The administrative and direct service staff worked together to plan and implement a process and an outcome evaluation. It works like this: Each service unit delivered is recorded on paper by the direct service providers and then is given monthly to the program director who compiles the data. The supervisor collects baseline data on several standardized and several program-specific measures at the time that new clients are assessed. Yearly data collection on each of these baseline measures is a regularly scheduled part of the program. Both midyear and end of year evaluation reports include basic data analysis. These reports were first written with considerable help from the evaluation coach but now are produced with little assistance. Members of the partnership who are not involved in the day-to-day implementation of the project periodically review reports, the program logic model and the evaluation plan with the program staff. Changes in staff or partner members do not interfere with the process because evaluation is sufficiently infused into the program operations. “Old” members train “new” members and the evaluation continues.

- Take time to plan for lasting, effective change.

Partnerships, in search of a compassionate and rapid response to needs, often develop programs that show limited results and are hard to sustain. In particular, partnerships should take care in the following ways:

- When possible, rely on replicable models based in effective practices research, and assure fidelity to the model. Granted, many valuable programs have limited research to support them, but increasingly, principles for practice have been validated. Taking time to discuss the “theory of change,” i.e. the beliefs and rationale that form the basis of a potential program, can build relations among the partners.

- Avoid loyalty to “feel good” or “easy” models. These models sometimes have merit in carefully goal-oriented combination with other programs, but often they are offered alone. Examples in the child, youth and family services are
  - office-based services (convenient for the worker, but clients avoid them);
  - group work misapplied to problems that require intensive individual attention;
  - psychoeducational programs (e.g., a problem with parenting classes for certain issues is that parents often know what to do, they just don’t practice it… they need support, not just education);
  - programs that provide a little help to many people rather than effective help to a few (for example, programs that serve youth with short, one or two week programs or monthly support group meetings for parents with no
additional contact are unlikely to lead to substantial changes in behavior or attitude); and
- programs that aim to reach a large geographic area, causing stretched resources, transportation difficulties, and weak local resident identification with the program.

**Lasting effective change**

Some of the Children and Families partnerships developed programs or services that dramatically changed people's lives, for example, by preventing “rapid repeat” teen pregnancies, creating affordable housing and new homeowners, improving the academic achievement of children and youth, screening people for health problems or filling their prescriptions or teaching English to Spanish speaking newcomers. For a variety of reasons, including the pursuit of funding, a desire to reach a large number of people (or the equation of “numbers” with “success”), impatience with long term interventions, or inadequate community assessments, others are implementing programs with less potential for demonstrated success. One partnership shifted from providing intense, multi-faceted intervention consistent with existing research on improving outcomes for emotionally troubled young people to targeting a larger number of youth with interventions of short duration and low intensity. Another partnership continues to experiment with a variety of support group and short educational programs in spite of the poor response from the community. A couple of programs are implementing strategies with very limited contact such as special events for youth, single home visits, or drop in centers. As they struggle to sustain programs, the partnerships are learning that demonstrated success is a necessary (even if sometimes insufficient) requirement for sustainability.

- Demonstrate tangible and intangible results to the partnership’s community.

Most often, effective partnerships stimulate the development of new programs or other resources for children and families. These programs should benefit the community, not the special interests of one or more partnership members. Tangible benefits are such effects as new child care slots, after-school tutors, and other specific programs for children or parents. Intangible benefits are the good will expressed by community residents toward the partnership and faith in its leadership. In order to assure that programs are on target, partnership members or specific partners who take the lead on program or resource development need skills in
  - needs and resource assessment;
  - identifying and choosing appropriate, effective, culturally relevant, and feasible interventions;
  - designing programs with measurable outcomes;
  - information management;
  - program evaluation; and
  - report writing.
Strong partnerships seem to draw upon various partners for these skills, rather than rely on one or two partners to practice them.

**Moving Toward Results**

In many of the partnerships, members could list results of their efforts. For example, they commented:

“Schools, courts, and absent parents are more aware of single parent homes and the needs of their children;”

[We] “developed strategies and programs so that a variety of programs build toward a common goal;”

“Our stability as a mainstay in our community continues to build trust with and in our community;”

“The provision of multiple services for families at one location and to diverse groups has served to meet many needs in an area of the county that has historically been underserved;”

[We] “break down barriers between the faith community and public projects;” and

“In my community, uninvolved citizens have finally begun reaching out....”

**Partnership Resource Development**

Each partnership in the *Children and Families Program* received at least three years’ funding to initiate a partnership that addresses local needs and take steps toward sustainability. The funding came from The Duke Endowment, a funding organization that is external to the community, through one of its beneficiaries, a local organization that has a long history in the community. Using this external stimulus, the partnerships had to expand their local “ownership” of the partnership.

From the beginning, the partnerships addressed resource development in the forms of volunteer time, leadership from among the partners, shared resources, and additional funding to supplement their initial grants and continue efforts beyond the grant period. After three or four years of development, the partnerships are struggling with core sustainability questions, such as:

- What should be sustained: The partnership as an organization? The partnership as a less formal entity? The new programs stimulated by the partnership? A reduced or revised form of the partnership?

- Should the partnership itself incorporate? Does the partnership need a separate identity to receive funds?
• Who is responsible for the partnership: Who are the sustaining members of the partnership? What is expected of them? Who will lead?

• What resources are required for a sustained partnership? Where will they come from?

The *Children and Family Program* partnerships tended to see their futures in terms of sustaining the programs they initiated and/or sustaining the partnerships. Figure 2 illustrates four distinct “sustainability” scenarios. Most of the Children and Families partnerships will fall more or less into one of these categories.

**Figure 2. Sustainability Scenarios**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Programs or services created will be sustained</th>
<th>Programs or services created will not be sustained</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Partnership as a collaborative planning organization will be sustained</strong></td>
<td><strong>Partnership as a collaborative planning organization will not be sustained.</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Well-organized partnership with a clearly defined role that is distinct from individual agencies or programs (e.g. to assess and plan to meet community needs for a particular community or group; to provide training or funding support to member agencies). Will continue to stimulate and support development of programs and services to meet emerging community needs. Will sustain programs created.</td>
<td>The partnership developed to realize a particular vision; stimulated development of appropriate services or programs and envisions no continuing role for itself. In other cases, the partnership never developed into a full partnership but did create programs that will continue because individual agencies will support them.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Well-organized partnership with a clearly defined role to assess and plan community needs for a particular community or group. Programs or services have been created with a limited life span and will end or the partnership has not yet developed sufficient funding to sustain them.</td>
<td>The partnership never fully developed or defined a role for itself. Programs have been expanded or created but for a variety of reasons, (necessary funding exceeds local capacity; new issues have emerged, lack of interest in programs) the programs will not be sustained.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
A couple of *Children and Families Program* partnerships have already ceased to operate. In these cases, partnerships may perceive that in creating programs or services to meet a particular community need, they have fulfilled their purpose and do not see a continuing role for the partnership as a planning group in their community. In one case, a partnership was not successful in developing a large, capital-intensive project and it has disbanded in favor of a second, similar effort in a nearby community.

In contrast, a couple of the partnerships are well structured, grounded in community support and clearly see a role for the partnership in continuing to assess and meet changing needs of families and children in their communities.

Most of the partnerships fall between these categories. Several will continue as diverse groups working together to plan and act on behalf of children and their families in informal ways (for example, without staff, as volunteers). A few will continue to operate to support the programs they have created or to implement a current plan but are not likely to develop and implement new programs. Partnerships are clarifying a role and strategy for support at this writing. Other partnerships would like to continue, but cannot commit the volunteer time or find the financial resources to support partnership staff.

As of the writing of this report, the twelve partnerships’ sustainability plans include

- Replace declining TDE program funding with resources from within the fiscal agent / lead agency plus other external grants;
- Secure external support for agency and its programs that evolved from the original informal partnership;
- Continue to secure resources for the partnership and programs in an effort that predates the *Children and Families Program*;
- Absorb programs into partner organizations and discontinue financial support for the partnership, but continue the partnership as a volunteer effort;
- Terminate the planned programs and the partnership and transfer commitment (partners’ energies and resources) to a different, new community partnership with a revised mission;
- Merge with a community partnership that has a similar mission and replace declining TDE program funding with resources from the local community and external grants;
- Dissolve program and partnership if grants continue to be refused.

For most of the groups, the substantial size of The Duke Endowment grant will be difficult to replace. They are prepared to scale down their efforts if necessary.

The **keys to promoting sustained resource development for the partnership** include

- Define resources broadly. Groups often think of money as their primary resource. That’s like thinking money is the source of family stability; it’s a necessary, but not sufficient resource, and may not be the most essential resource at all.
Resources include affirming support from community members (such as people promoting the partnership’s reputation or recommending that donations be given to it); instrumental support (such as providing space or materials); time and energy (direct participation in partnership activities); program support (making consumer referrals or helping to develop a service program); and a host of other tangible and intangible resources. Most of these resources can be used to leverage the money that covers the core operating expenses. A sustainability plan will identify all these potential resources and sustainability action will involve concerted efforts by partnership members to develop the resources.

**Community Ownership**

The twelve partnerships received numerous resources that supplemented their grants from The Duke Endowment and their own partner’s contributions. As examples, buy-in from community members took the form of:

- Meeting space in a local church;
- Office space donated by local industry
- Office equipment donated by a partner member
- Workers employed by the local health department out-stationed at the partnership program office;
- Land for recreation facility donated by a local citizen;
- Time contributed by local university faculty and students;
- Half of coordinator’s salary paid by Extension Service;
- Office of Juvenile Justice funded most of a caseworker’s position and part of an administrative assistant;
- Supplies for youth program donated by local business; and
- Financial contribution from church for youth groups.

- **Start early.**
  As soon as a partnership perceives that its work will be promising or successful, the group should begin to develop a sustainability plan. In the early stages, many partnerships are unfocused or unable to practice forward thinking. Too often, they delay addressing the long-term needs of their group. Effective resource development occurs concurrently with partnership development and program development.

- **Maintain good balance between program development, partnership development, and resource development.**
  Given that they tended to move quickly toward filling service gaps, the partnerships had the dual challenge of sustaining the new service and the partnership. Members of most partnerships prioritized sustaining the program over the partnership. This
accomplished the goal of establishing a particular program, but it detracted from the goal of building the community’s capacity to respond to multiple child and family needs over time.

Sustainable partnerships that do community planning for children’s needs and stimulate program development require three types of partners: those that can deliver programs, those that can lead the partnership as members of a planning coalition, and those that can access resources. Sometimes one person can fill all roles. For example, the director of a county parks program can oversee a youth program, participate fully on a partnership, and authorize funds for youth or the partnership. Most often, different people fulfill different roles, such as when a youth program coordinator handles the services, an executive director represents the agency in the partnership, and a local business leader finds resources for the program. The youth program coordinator and the business person may rarely attend a partnership meeting, but they are key to sustainability of the partnership and are connected through relationships with partners. These relationships must be nurtured.

- Use external funds to seed programs that can feasibly be supported by local resources.

Some partnerships used their TDE grants to partially fund new programs and demonstrate their success, with a clear plan that local groups would take over their operation and funding once their success was demonstrated. Other groups, who directly operated programs with their grants rather than regarding them as seed grants, struggled to attain community “buy-in” and ownership of the program. The seeded programs tended to be more sustainable.

**Resource-sharing and Sustainability**

This partnership effectively “absorbed” new youth activities that were created through the TDE partnership grant into existing community agency programs. Agency leaders serving on the partnership shared a strong commitment to creating safe, structured, and enriching experiences for county children. Few such activities existed before the grant. For example, the ten-week summer day camp that had been grant-funded and administered by the partnership’s fiscal agent, a hospital system, was absorbed into the Cooperative Extension system. The extension’s strong 4-H curriculum combined with the hospital’s wellness perspective make for a quality sustainable summer program for the future. Together, the agencies determined ways to use DSS funding for scholarships and charge a reasonable fee for those who could pay for camp. The Cooperative Extension is prepared to seek additional grant funding and will allocate county money to continue this program.

A similar successful transition occurred with such activities as the partnership’s night basketball, arts camp, and children’s festival, which will be sustained by the county parks and recreation department. The area Junior Service League will contribute to sustaining the activities.
• **Use external funds to support grant-writing and other forms of resource development.**

  Partnership staff or members need time to work on resource development. Given that they must also give time to nurturing the partnership itself and developing programs, their responsibilities can be cumbersome. An array of skills is required to accomplish everything.

  Partnerships sometimes looked to grant-writing as the key to sustained funding without recognizing that the written work is only part of resource development. Building relationships with potential funders provides a context for grant and other funding awards. In one case, the partnership applied funds from its TDE grant to hire a grant-writer.

  Partnerships sometimes neglected to secure and document in-kind and local contributions as indicators of local capacity to support the partnership and its programs. Most external funders expect such local sponsorship before they will contribute to the effort. Community members who support the partnership need not be partners themselves.

• **Avoid “putting all your eggs in one basket.”**

  Most nonprofit organizations require a diverse resource portfolio in order to survive and thrive. That way, when one resource shrinks or dies, or one is affected by the whims of the broader economy, others can sustain the work of the organization.

## CONCLUSION

Twelve communities responded to The Duke Endowment’s challenge to build a partnership that would improve the lives of children and families in their community. They matched the investment of funds by TDE, an external entity, with their own local energy, skills, and resources. All the communities report that their local capacity for working together to plan and act for children and their families has been enhanced in specific, observable ways. All but one of the communities initiated new direct services.

None of the communities report that the work was easy. They built bridges across organizational, cultural, and personal boundaries to accomplish their common goals. They learned many new lessons and affirmed many old lessons about how to build and sustain effective community action.

Their challenge was essentially three-fold:

1. Build a partnership for leading the community’s response, now and in the future, to child and family needs;
2. Create new services or enhance existing services to fill gaps; and
3. Establish a resource base that can sustain the partnerships and the programs it supports.

The partnerships are, as of the writing of this report, between three and five years old, except for the two that pre-existed the TDE grant. They have devoted resources to building the partnership’s spirit, membership, consumer participation, leadership, and structure. They have practiced skilled interorganizational and organizational development and initiated systems to demonstrate accountability. They have struggled to develop sustained local resources.

Time will tell whether the skills acquired by partners as they participated in this process will lead to lasting change in their communities. The sustained existence of the partnership as a formal organization or of the new or enhanced services programs reflects only one way to assess the effect of the *Children and Families Program*. As community development goes, three to five years is a short period, too short for most new organizations to establish solid existences. The short-term existence of a formal community partnership often leads to long-term community relations that bolster other evolving efforts in the life of the community. As time passes, more lessons about the effects of partnerships on child and family well-being will emerge from the twelve *Children and Family Program* communities.