New Mexico to Host Community Learning Exchange. Page 7

Inside: Strategies to help nonprofits survive these tough financial times. Page 3.
“After I graduated, I stayed [in contact with the teen center] to help out as much as I could. It feels like home here.”

— Arika Simmons, youth fellow, Boys and Girls Club, Benton Harbor, Michigan.

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As the current economic crisis threatens to deepen, now is an opportune time for nonprofits and grassroots organizations to take heed of their financial health. "A nonprofit's finances are often seen as a necessary evil rather than a [potentially] creative and innovative [opportunity] to create a stable base," says Kate Barr, executive director of Nonprofits Association Fund, which makes loans to nonprofits and conducts financial management and strategic financial training in Minnesota and adjacent communities.

Barr tells her clients that now is the time to be analytical about what they are doing before rallying all the troops to attack the problem of diminishing funding sources. "It's about focus," she says as she urges organizations to examine what their historical funding sources are, what it costs them to deliver services, and how sources of income flow through the organization and produce results. They must carefully assess what their income and expense profiles look like, and then determine which activities move their mission forward with an eye toward scaling back to focus on the areas where they have the strongest...
impact.

The next step is to look for those activities where an organization has impact and also brings something unique and special to the situation that warrants preserving those activities. An organization must then ask itself, “What is going to be an appropriate and sustainable way to fund this?” This is when those that have cultivated solid relationships over time will do well.

The Power of Relationships

“Relationships are what it’s all based on. Relationships between the community organization and the community they serve,” Barr says, “as well as their funders and other organizations. Mapping relationships is pivotal to understanding where relationships exist and what forms these relationships take. An organization may find that they can hand some of their work off to another organization and still remain involved as a contributor. But sometimes an element of competition among organizations may have crept into the relationship and cooperation, and by default service delivery, can suffer. “Some organizations will have to take on a new humility and will have to admit that other people do good work, too.” Organizations may have to work collectively in creating a community network to provide the best level of service, which should be their ultimate goal. “If you’re not the right place for an activity to be effective, [it] should happen someplace else.” However, Barr cautions against the temptation to strive for efficiency as a goal at the expense of some specialized services that only one or a few organizations can offer. “We may lose some [organizations] that shouldn’t be lost in the rally for improving efficiency … thereby risking true community engagement.”

Barr feels strongly that now is a testing time for leadership of all stripes. She is convinced that organizations that have invested time and attention in building leadership and management skills will fare best. Roles and responsibilities of board members in contrast to what staff personnel do should be clear, and those who are repositories of knowledge and skills at all levels should be readily identifiable.

“Well-respected, impactful organizations have relationships all along with peers or community organizations,” Barr says. “If you have developed good leadership, if you have lived good values, [the economic situation] isn’t as huge an obstacle as it sounds, your organization is ready to do this. For those that have not, it’s going to be tougher.” ▲

News from the Cross-Session Gathering taking place in South Carolina in early March.

The Bridge will feature the lessons of sustainability and what it looks like going forward.
Collective Leadership Works Tool Kit

In this era of change, the need to find ways of working together across barriers has taken on a new urgency. More and more people are seeking out innovative ways to reenergize community activism and aspirations for social justice and equity. Serving the common good is once again a valued endeavor and participating in community organizing is seen as a useful means to effect lasting social change. For the past seven years, Kellogg Leadership for Community Change (KLCC) has promoted collective leadership as a means of bringing needed and lasting change to communities across the nation that span a wide spectrum of profiles and priorities. KLCC Session 2, which ran from spring 2005 to fall 2007, emphasized youth-adult partnerships. The partnership experiences of five communities that participated in KLCC 2 provided lessons that anchor a new tool kit released by the Innovation Center for Community and Youth Development, one of the KLCC coordinating organizations. The recently released Collective Leadership Works: Preparing Youth and Adults for Community Change tool kit is now available to the public.

The Innovation Center concluded that, “Collective leadership has the unique ability to unite human, culture, and technological resources so that local people come together to improve their communities for a common wellbeing.” Collective leadership focuses on group rather than individual leadership with the conviction that prioritizing community benefit over personality will cultivate natural leadership in a number of group members. True to this paradigm, youth-adult partnerships offer a societally beneficial arrangement in terms of uniting in leadership those who are affected by community ills. The new tool kit makes these partnerships central.

Why are youth-adult partnerships critical?
The voice of youth gives adults a critical perspective and a source of creative energy for all sorts of issues. Adults bring to young people important experience and connections that help them transform their ideas into meaningful action.

Why focus on building readiness?
The tool kit focuses on building readiness through relationship building. A team’s strengths and assets become known through these relationships, which reveal how best to cross boundaries to enable powerful community change work.

How do I use this tool kit?
The tool kit is intended to give you concrete tips and practical activities that you can apply in forming and strengthening a community change group and its work including:

- Forming your social change group
- Setting a solid foundation for strong youth-adult partnerships
- Knowing your community

Coming together in creative ways
- Developing relationships, both individual and group
- Planning your course of action
- Sustaining your group and its work
- Spreading the word about your group.

Who should use this tool kit?
The tool kit can be used by youth and adults who wish to create, lead, facilitate or participate in asset-based community development, community building, or social justice efforts.

The lessons in the tool kit can be used by groups at any stage of development in their work as defined by KLCC experience: building readiness, visioning and planning, implementation, and change and sustainability. A group at the building readiness stage can use the tool kit to engage others; a group past this stage can use it to help strengthen existing relationships.

Portions of this story were excerpted from Collective Leadership Works: Preparing Youth and Adults for Community Change. To obtain a hard copy of the tool kit, contact the Innovation Center at (301) 270-1700 or visit the Innovation Center online at www.theinnovationcenter.org for further information.
News & Notes

— News & Notes is compiled by the KLCC Bridge editorial staff. Comments and future news brief items should be forwarded to info@klccleadership.org.

Benton Harbor’s New Executive Director Embraces KLCC

Doug Schaffer spent the last 10 years as the athletic director and men’s basketball coach at Benton Harbor’s Lake Michigan College, but his six months as the new executive director of the Boys and Girls Club of Benton Harbor (BGCBH) opened his eyes to a new way of perceiving youth development. “I had only been in this role for a couple of months and I [initially] perceived the KLCC programming as [just] another example of a youth development program,” says Schaffer. “[Adults say to the kids] ‘here is what you have to do on a daily basis and you will be equipped for success in school, outside school and on into adulthood.’”

This perception got reworked during a meeting this past November when KLCC-affiliated staff from the W.K. Kellogg Foundation oriented Schaffer to a new way of considering how youth and adults can cooperate to promote youth development. “After the meeting, I saw that youth-adult partnerships extend beyond youth development. Youth and mentors grow together and learn from each other, the voice of young people is able to be heard.”

The open exchange of ideas at the November meeting gave Schaffer a firsthand look at the way that KLCC encourages and engages in forthright dialogue to pierce straight through to the heart of any matter at hand. “We celebrated successful stories of our young people and also shared some of our shortcomings. More than once we talked about how refreshing it was that everyone could say ‘here’s where we fell short and this is what we learned from our mistakes,’” Schaffer says. He is quick to acknowledge the learning opportunities that have arisen out of the transfer of experience-based knowledge from one generation of KLCC fellows to the next. “I think that this class of KLCC fellows has the opportunity to be impacted even more [than the previous one]. They will have the benefit of alumnae who went through the process coming back from college and from the professionals who are built-in mentors, who were them not that many years ago.”

Benton Harbor Seeks to Expand Teen Access

As a five-year Benton Harbor resident, Boys and Girls Club (BGCBH) executive director Doug Schaffer is aware of the need for programming that addresses the needs of a broad cross section of young people in the community. The Club, the common name for the teen center on the campus of Benton Harbor High School, provides a place for high-school-age youth to gather after school. Unfortunately, the same level of service is not equally accessible to teens of the same age group who live closer to the Main Street headquarters of BGCBH closer to downtown. “Teens [who live downtown] have to make a decision about whether to stay at the teen center after school when they don’t know how they will get home later,” Schaffer says. Public transportation is not readily available in this small Michigan town.

To meet this need, BGCBH is pursuing the development of a program at the main location modeled on the KLCC fellowship at work at The Club, which would be housed in a large space currently available at the headquarters. A group of young fellows, headed by Arika Simmons, is working with local businesses in the areas of layout and design in selecting furniture and other enhancements for the teen room. “Arika is putting her expertise into doing her best to create a great environment for serving our community, which has growing capacity needs,” says Schaffer. “We are seeking capacity-building dollars to make this happen.”

A youth fellow since the beginning of Benton Harbor’s KLCC project in 2005, Simmons has developed the skills and confidence to negotiate with local vendors on behalf of the teen center. “[Arika] understands, not being much continued on page 7
older than the current teen group, that we as adults overreach on certain things that may not be important to teens,” says Liji Hanny, program director of the BGCBH Teen Center, referring to Simmons’ cost-cutting suggestions that saved $10,000 from the proposed $30,000 budget.

“Teens need to be able to walk in and feel they fit in,” says Simmons of her input on the design, furnishings and layout of the new teen center. “The new location will permit teens without rides home [from the original teen center on the Benton Harbor High School campus] to be accommodated.” Simmons, who is currently in her sophomore year at Lake Michigan College, is well aware of the important role that the center and the KLCC fellowship play in preparing youth for leadership. “I was nothing like I am now as far as my organizational skills and other things. Liji has been there along the way ... I have him and the Kellogg leadership program to thank for that.” Simmons also works part time at Whirlpool. “She’s grown up a lot, she’s amazing,” says Hanny. They hope to be up and running by the spring. ▲  

New Mexico to Host Third Community Learning Exchange

On the heels of the most recent Community Learning Exchange (CLE) in Chelsea, Mass., to share collective leadership practices, there is tremendous excitement at the KLCC Session One site, New Mexico’s Laguna-Acoma community. Lee Francis, IV, executive director of the KLCC-affiliated Laguna Education Foundation, is spearheading the effort to bring CLE to life for his home community, and to showcase the spirit of collective leadership that is embodied there.

“Our idea is the continuation of the Roca [Chelsea] work, trying to keep Roca [CLE participants] involved while expanding the concepts to promote our community change work of the last six years,” says Francis. “What we’re trying to do is to build upon [our experiences] of story and place in this Native and land-grant community with Hispanic traditions [that are] 400 years deep, we will hit on that.”

Francis recalls being deeply moved and inspired by the personal stories he heard as a participant in Roca’s learning exchange. “People told these wonderful stories of their learning and change being driven by an encounter. One PTA mom talked about how she was tired of seeing things the way they were [and decided to get involved]. It’s not a statistic, but a story of change,” Francis says. How those stories affect others and how their telling can be utilized to promote change will be central to the CLE to be held March 17-20 in Albuquerque.

For more information contact Lee Francis at 505-552-6352 or Steve Stapleton at 206-328-3020. ▲

Innovation Center Launches New Web Site

In December, The Innovation Center for Community and Youth Development launched a new Web site offering resources and interactive features to serve youth-orientated social justice programming. “The website serves as a go-to source for the Innovation Center’s youth leadership and social justice programming. It includes resources on program development, evaluation and youth-adult partnership,” according to the Innovation Center’s press release.

The new site also features the KLCC Knowledge Well, which brings together tools, activities and online communities around collective leadership and youth-adult partnership practices. The Knowledge Well is funded by the W.K. Kellogg Foundation.

For more information, visit www.theinnovationcenter.org or call 301-270-1700. ▲
“We have, as human beings, a storytelling problem. We’re a bit too quick to come up with explanations for things we don’t really have an explanation for.”

— Malcom Gladwell