

THE STRATEGIC COINVESTOR APPROACH

COMPONENTS AND LESSONS

In 2012, the Annie E. Casey Foundation launched its seven-year Family-Centered Community Change™ (FCCC) initiative to support local partnerships in three high-poverty neighborhoods as they developed a more integrated set of services — including high-quality education, job training and housing assistance — to help parents and children succeed together in what is known as a “two-generation approach.” Rather than creating something new, the Foundation joined these partnerships, located in Buffalo, New York; Columbus, Ohio; and San Antonio, Texas, and provided technical assistance, trainings and peer learning opportunities to build on their community change efforts. Casey called this method of joining an ongoing initiative being a strategic coinvestor — a unique mindset and a departure from more directive approaches. **The strategic coinvestor approach had eight components:**



1

Flexible grant funding
(of which a percentage is
for use at the local site’s
discretion)



5

**The funder serves as a
strategic thought partner**
and sounding board while
providing on-demand
technical assistance



2

**A high-touch staffing
model**, with significant
in-person time from the
Foundation



6

**Facilitation of
networking** and
learning across sites



3

A non-directive relationship,
with the funder deferring to
local discretion in program
design and implementation of
an agreed-upon topic



7

**Nesting of a focused
issue** within an existing
broader community
change effort



4

**An assumption that the work
is done in collaboration** with
other investing and
implementing partners
(including other funders)



8

Ongoing evaluation
of the investment
approach and the
funder’s role



LESSONS FROM AN EVALUATION

TCC Group conducted a seven-year evaluation of the strategic coinvestor approach in Family-Centered Community Change. This evaluation collected data from implementers, community members and Foundation staff and consultants. Results revealed:

LESSONS FOR THE COMMUNITY



The approach requires community representatives to change their thinking about the relationship with the funder. This includes a willingness to push back when there is a difference of opinion and being open to an authentic conversation about the best course.



Plan how (and why) to use technical assistance before it is received and what follow-up and implementation support will be necessary. It is also important to understand the desired result for the technical assistance to be effective.



Nesting of a program or concept within a broader community change initiative is effective but not necessarily natural. Value and sustainability come from building on existing infrastructure and vision. It's critical to keep paying attention to how the work is positioned, so that it doesn't become siloed and lose the value of contributing to broader change.



Defining the core components of the work, even as adaptation happens, is important to communicating the concept and managing multiple investor relationships.



The approach benefits from having a backbone organization to help partners understand their unique value and role to the success of the whole. With so many entities involved in a strategic coinvestor approach, organizations can lose sight of how they fit in, which can undermine the strength of relationships.

LESSONS FOR THE FUNDER



Jointly identify and name non-negotiables and core values at the beginning of the initiative.



Be prepared to show up fully. This includes building trust and relationships, providing advice and resources and spending time to learn from data, none of which this happens fast or automatically.



Fit is crucial. An initial getting-to-know-you process may make it more likely that a mutually supportive relationship is established between the funder and the community change initiative.



Suggest (but don't mandate) areas where technical assistance may be useful. A responsive approach doesn't mean waiting for the community to ask; it means being committed to having a dialogue about what assistance might be valuable and when.



Evaluation can be one of the trickiest parts. Evaluation approaches should follow the same principles as other elements of the strategic coinvestor approach, including joint construction of evaluation goals and methods.



The approach alone does not eliminate power dynamics. Funders need to continually ask for feedback and provide opportunities for engagement with all implementing partners.

Learn more about Family-Centered Community Change at aecf.org/work/community-change/



THE ANNIE E. CASEY FOUNDATION