Getting Big Results

Why Invest in Collaborative Leadership Development?

Summary Report
Results Based Leadership Collaborative
University of Maryland, School of Public Policy
College Park, MD

DECEMBER 2012

This report is submitted in partial fulfillment of the Quality Improvement and Research Agenda (QIRA) work conducted at the University of Maryland School of Public Policy and supported by the Annie E. Casey Foundation. The purpose of the QIRA was to study the effectiveness of using the Theory of Aligned Contributions to design and guide the implementation of the Leadership in Action, collaborative leadership development program. The report summarizes findings and lessons learned over the past three years about what it takes to successfully build the capacity of leaders to collaborate so that their efforts lead to measurable improvements for children, families and communities. The report closes with a set of recommendations to improve the quality of leadership development programs that develop the competency and skills of cross-sector leaders to collaborate effectively to get results. The findings and lessons learned provide useful insights for those providing and investing in collaborative leadership development programs.

Past and Current QIRA Team Members

<u>University of Maryland, School of Public Policy Staff and Associates</u>

Dr. Nina P. Harris, Assistant Dean of Undergraduate Studies

Dr. Victoria Goddard-Truitt, Director of the Results Based Leadership Collaborative

Jennifer Littlefield, Associate Director College Park Scholars Public Leadership Program and Doctoral Candidate

Julie O'Brien, Doctoral Candidate, Department of Psychology

Dr. Jolie Bain Pillsbury, Faculty Associate

<u>Annie E. Casey Foundation</u>

Jennifer Gross, Senior Associate, Talent and Leadership Development

Barbara Squires, Director, Leadership Development

Dr. Donna Stark, Vice President for Talent Management and Leadership Development

December 2013

"Not business as usual"

The purpose of this final report is to summarize key findings and lessons learned from the Annie E. Casey Foundation (Casey Foundation) and University of Maryland, School of Public Policy partnership to determine what it takes to build the capacity of leaders to work together to make a collective impact for communities. In this report, findings from the quality improvement and research agenda (QIRA) which studied the Casey Foundation's Leadership in Action Programs (LAP) will be used to offer recommendations that lead to a deeper understanding of the approaches that work and do not work to improve collaborative efforts to get results. It is hoped that these findings and lessons learned provide useful insights for those providing collaborative leadership development programs and to foundations and organizations that invest in such programs. The emphasis is placed on thinking about the utility of developing the capacity of leaders to collaborate. Do leaders who have collaborative leadership skills turn curves for children, families and communities?

"Did I originally buy into LAP? No. Do I buy into it now? Yes. I can actually see tangible results of what we're doing. That's what sold me."

Mike Lloyd, Transitional Facilities and Community-based Programs Director for the Indiana Department of Corrections (IDOC).

Contents

Why Invest in Collaborative Leadership Development?

Getting Big Results Requires Collaborative Efforts

While many communities across the country struggle to address complex social problems such as babies born healthy, school readiness, economic stability and public safety, leaders in Marion County, Indiana, have made measureable progress in reducing recidivism. From 2007 to 2011, the percent of ex-offenders who were rearrested within one year of release went from 55% to 23.5% (IDOC Recidivism Data 2009—2011). Many people in the county say this improvement is due in part to the collaborative work of a cross-sector group of local leaders from public, nonprofit, and for-profit agencies who came together to address the problem of recidivism.

These results from Marion County support the supposition that getting big results requires collaborative efforts to address social problems that cannot be achieved by any one organization. In fact, the number of cross-sector collaborative efforts has increased; however, many collaborative efforts simply do not make a sustainable or measurable improvement for people and communities. In part, this lack of sustained results can be attributed to the complex, unpredictable, and entangled dynamics of collaborative groups (Bryson, Crosby & Stone, 2006; Queen 2011). Researchers and practitioners propose that the heterarchical structure of collaborative initiatives results in issues related to management, power, authority, accountability, decision-making, and conflict resolution. Each of these challenges interferes with performance, taking action and influencing results (Thompson & Perry, 2006; Huxham & Vangen, 2005; Roberts & Bradley, 1991; Bryson et al., 2006).

Recent research by Kania and Kramer (2011) suggest that collaboratives are most successful when they operate within an environment that provides structure and focuses on a shared agenda. These authors cite five requisite conditions that lead to results: a common agenda, shared measurement systems, mutually reinforcing activities, continuous communication, and a backbone support organization. Moreover, they recommend that funders support leadership development to build member capacity in a collaborative. The goal is for members to leverage the opportunity and their resources so that the collaborative initiative is able to function independently over an extended period of time.

This latter assumption about the role of leadership in the success of collaborative work is the subject of this document. Like Kania and Kramer, we propose that establishing skilled and competent leadership is an essential element of collaborative leadership that gets results. We expand on this concept by defining leadership as being an inherent responsibility in all positions, not as a trait or set of responsibilities that belong to "tops."

Collaborative Leadership Requires a Distinct Skill Set

Leadership is essential to developing a comprehensive set of actions that generate results; however, supporting these efforts requires a specific set of collaborative leadership skills that accelerate and strengthen the performance of leaders as they work together. These skills are crucial when striving for significant results for communities that require collaborative efforts across agencies and sectors.

Leaders in these groups must learn to make decisions that stick, problem-solve and reach consensus, manage conflict and competing interests, and be accountable for taking actions to achieve results.

The Casey Foundation has long recognized the importance of investing in leadership to advance and sustain meaningful change. The cornerstone of their leadership work has been the hallmark Children and Family Fellowship, which enrolls individuals from across the nation in a comprehensive skill-building program designed to strengthen leaders' capacity to improve outcomes for children and families in disadvantaged communities. Over time, The Casey Foundation developed an interest in broadening its leadership development portfolio to support groups of leaders working collaboratively at the community level.

In 2001, the Casey Foundation developed the Leadership in Action Program (LAP), a skills-driven, competency-based leadership development program designed using the Theory of Aligned Contributions (TOAC) as a change model (Pillsbury, 2008). The Theory of Aligned Contributions contends that it is more likely that population-level change will occur when a critical mass of leaders uses a set of collaborative skills and tools to (1) focus on a single result, for which they have a sense of urgency to improve, (2) create a culture of accountability, and (3) align and execute actions and strategies across agencies and programs at a high enough scope and scale to contribute to measurable improvements. The execution of LAP programs begins with a call to action initiated by an influential group of leaders who identify a result and data that measures the success for a population. This group, known as the accountability partner, invites thirty to forty leaders from multiple sectors to work collaboratively to make a collective impact on the result. The work of the LAP is to build the capacity of leaders to collaborate across sectors. The LAP leaders meet for nine 2-day meetings; meetings occur at six to eight week intervals over the course of twelve to fourteen months. The meting environment or "container" is managed to support leaders in doing the adaptive work of engaging in heterarchical relationships to get things done. Leaders manage issues of power and authority, develop accountability systems, use data to make decisions, address issues of disparities and manage conflict. The Casey Foundation implemented fourteen LAPs over the past decade including the Marian County LAP whose result is "ex-offenders integrate successfully into the community" as measured by the 3-year recidivism rate.

While leadership development is important, it is a means to an end. The questions remains as to whether developing leaders' capacity to collaborate leads to measurable impacts for people and communities. To answer this question, Foundation partnered with the University of Maryland School of Public Policy to implement a quality improvement and research agenda (QIRA). The overall purpose of the QIRA was to determine what methods and processes of collaborative leadership development could predictably build the capacity of leaders to make measurable differences that improved the well being of people and communities. Specifically, the QIRA was designed to achieve the following:

- Gather information to more fully understand the relationship between the implementation of the TOAC and development of results based leadership (RBL) skills of leaders;
- Collect evidence to support or refute the validity of the basic tenets of the TOAC; and
- Make recommendations that lead to quality improvement of RBL programs that support improved performance of leaders to be in high action and high alignment to contribute to results that turn curves for the positive well being of individuals, families and communities.

6

Similar to Kania and Kramer, the TOAC posits successful collaboratives must begin with a disciplined focus on a measurable result (agenda and shared measurement system and take aligned actions at a specified scope and scale (reinforcing activities). These elements are believed to be essential to a collaborative group's ability to make a measurable difference for a population. The TOAC goes on to further suggest that the development of a formal accountability structure is integral in getting leaders to move to high action and high alignment in their strategic planning. It is important to note that operating in an arrangement where authority is shared presents adaptive challenges and leaders need to manage these challenges to avoid the inadequate performance of members in the collaborative.

Unlike Kania and Kramer, TOAC makes no assumption about a need for a separate backbone organization; instead, the TOAC rests solidly on the development and use of four leadership competencies. These include: (1) using results-based accountability (RBA), which provides leaders with the skills and tools to focus on a specified result and use data to make decisions; (2) engaging in a conversation about race, class and culture to deepen understanding disparate outcomes and identify what it takes to mitigate such disparities; (3) having the ability to "lead from the middle," enlist others, and take action in service of the result; and (4) exercising collaborative leadership to support development of relationship, trust and accountability structures needed to take aligned actions (Pillsbury, 2008). Without an expectation of continued support beyond the implementation phase, LAP groups must decide if and how to continue the work began over the past year. Where many grant-based programs end at the end of the fiscal support, more than half of the LAP groups have continued their work with forty percent continuing for more than three years.

Collaborative Leadership Skills Can Be Predictably Developed

The LAP model develops collaborative leadership skills within the context of a group where members are engaged in their "real" work. The subject of the development is both the group as a whole and individuals within the group. Leaders are constantly coached to use the lens of Person-Role-System as a fractal for seeing integrated systems and exercising authority in their role—both formal and informal. Over time, leaders are able to clearly understand how personal attributes and system demands influence the roles they play within and outside of the LAP and intentionally consider their contribution to making a collective impact. Leadership skills are not solely for the development of individuals within the group, but are to be used in one's home agency and other areas of influence.

The collaborative leadership development design has three elements—a call to action, a "container" for the work, and experiential learning to build the capacity to collaborate. The call to action is a mechanism designed to focus leaders on a single measurable result with urgency and public accountability. An influential group of leaders, such as a state-level children's cabinet or a foundation interested in community wellness, invites multi-sector community leaders to come together and work toward solving a social problem (e.g. third grade reading). This influential body is known as the accountability partner and not only do they name a specific result, such as "children are ready to enter kindergarten," they also identify a set of 1—3 indicators of success.

The container provides the space, time and materials to support leaders as they work together.

Leaders met for nine two-day meetings over the course of 14—18 months. This willingness to tear oneself from their work demonstrates a strong commitment to the result and is a necessary component of the program (Goddard-Truitt, 2012 op-ed). Attendance is highly correlated with accountability and alignment (Littlefield & O'Brien, 2011).

The capacity to collaborate is developed through action learning experiences within the container and using tools and skills between meetings. Also, skilled coach/facilitators who are qualified as Results Based Facilitators^{TM} (RBF) guide the learning process and are expected to maintain a stance of neutrality and not act as an expert consultant. Moreover, the facilitator introduces skills and tools, helps leaders to understand and clarify roles, gives the problem to the group to solve, and builds their capacity to work together, and to tolerate the uncertainty of formulating and the adaptive challenge of executing strategies. Leaders use factor analysis of data, evidenced based practices, their experiences, and innovative inquiry to develop strategic approaches to addressing the problem. At the heart of effective leadership skills is the development of relationships that allows leaders to build consensus, manage conflict, let-go of individual agendas and leverage relationships on behalf of results and performance. As many LAP participants note, "It's not business as usual."

O'Brien, Littlefield and Goddard-Truitt (2012) evaluated the effectiveness of the TOAC's capacity building approach to accelerate multi-sector leaders' efforts to collaborate and to influence change in their respective communities. Consistent with TOAC, O'Brien et al. find that an implementation team led by RBF facilitators who are highly skilled in task and relationship (Northouse, 2010) contribute to improving the LAP participants' collaborative leadership skills and their efforts to develop strong working relationships among their fellow participants. Moreover, the combination of a skilled implementation team and participants' improved collaborative skills lead to their ability to create strategies that align with what it takes to influence community change.

Ultimately, the TOAC suggests and O'Brien et al. findings reveal that a skilled implementation team and leadership tools are important factors in getting leaders to work collaboratively, align their efforts, act on commitments and maintain accountability. Together, these are ingredients for influencing positive community change.

Highlights of Findings and Lessons Learned

This section presents a summary of findings based on evidence from research conducted by the QIRA research team concerning the Casey Foundation's LAP programs. Methodologies used in the research included descriptive, quantitative, and qualitative analysis. The research suggests that the LAP, using the TOAC as its change model, developed the capacity of leaders to work collaboratively to address community challenges that have contributed to measurable changes at the community and/or program-levels to improve specified social problems. For LAP groups demonstrating a contribution to improving the well-being of select populations, contributions were noted after the completion of the implementation phase of LAP.

Finding #1: LAP leaders influenced and leveraged change in their communities that contributed to population and program-level results. Leadership development of collaborative skills contributed to their capacity to make substantive changes.

- LAP leaders in Indianapolis were one of the highest functioning leadership groups and implemented two major strategies at a scope and scale that likely contributed to the measurable improvement of the recidivism rate. Actions that contributed to measurable changes were the implementation of two strategies that changed driver licensing policy and technical rule violation alternatives. Measurable change occurred in the second year of the LAP leaders continuing their work together.
- Several other LAP groups influenced and leveraged change in their communities and organizations. The following are examples of efforts initiated and sustained by LAP leaders:
  - LAP influenced state and local-level efforts—
    - Maryland Leadership in Action Agenda was adopted by the state legislature and served as a blueprint for local implementation. Essential elements of the agenda continue to guide the work of Maryland 11 years after its inception.
    - The Early Care and Education Committee was established by the Maryland Governor to oversee school readiness work—a committee that was advocated for by MLAP LAP leaders
    - In Maryland, government agencies, public schools, nonprofits, faith-based organizations, corporate entities, and parent representatives continue to work together to improve school readiness.
    - LAP leaders influenced the further implementation of the results framework in their home organizations at either the state or local level—an example is that a LAP leader who now runs the Judy Centers has said that her experience in LAP lead her to infuse her program efforts at the state level with results accountability.
    - Training programs for teachers improved quality in Baltimore City and other Maryland jurisdictions.
    - Integration of early learning and development curricula has become a mainstay in several cultural institutes in Baltimore City (e.g., Enoch Pratt Library, Port Discovery, and Walters Art Gallery).
    - Sustained partnerships focusing on early literacy have grown (e.g., Anne Arundel County Early Childhood Coalition-Former LAP with AA Public Schools, AA Public Libraries, Baltimore-Washington Medical Center, Franklin Toys).
    - From the original participation of a librarian in the Maryland LAP, librarians and libraries are significant contributors to early childhood strategies in every jurisdiction in Maryland.
    - Development of one of the few Pre-K programs specifically designed for refugee children was implemented in DeKalb County.
  - Leverage of resources occurred. Several leaders attributed procuring grants and fiscal support to being a part of a cross-sector, multi-discipline body:
    - $272,054 was given to the DeKalb Partners for Early Learning and DeKalb County to implement systems of care approach in two communities targeted during the LAP program.
    - $500,000 in public and private funds was raised to support Countdown to Kindergarten in Baltimore City.
    - $1 million in federal grants has been secured for early literacy.
    - $250,000 has been invested in the Weinberg Foundation for pre-K books and materials.

- Capital funding from Abel Foundation was secured to help establish an early childhood education program expending Pre-K slots in a vulnerable community in Baltimore City.
- O'Brien, Littlefield, and Goddard-Truitt (2012) found that there exists a direct relationship between collaborative leadership skills and the perceived change in the incidence of the problem by participants. It is suggested that when participants develop collaborative leadership skills in LAP they bring these skills to their work outside of LAP. The utility of providing support to collaboratives as a whole, and in particular, on how focusing on collaborative leadership development adds to the effects of accountability for improving the productivity of collaboratives, and has a direct effect on the perception of having contributed to community-level changes that occur within and beyond the scope of the collaborative.

It is difficult to definitively quantify the extent to which LAP leaders have contributed to improvement at the population level problems without qualification. While the types of leverage and influence that they have had could suggest that contributions were obviously made, there is a paucity of direct metrics to support this for all but one LAP. The LAP with the most useful evidence is Indianapolis whose tracking of performance measure metrics was clearer and closely tied to the strategies enacted. LAPs being implemented after 2009 benefited from quality improvements enacted by the implementation team that focused on embedding performance measures in strategies and took a rigorous approach to tracking action commitments that in turn strengthened leaders strategies in work groups. It was possible in Indianapolis to connect the decrease in the one-year recidivism rate with the increase attention to decreasing technical rule violations and changes made that allowed ex-offenders to obtain state identification which is a door to employment and housing, factors that improve integration into communities.

Interestingly, many of the earlier LAPs did not believe that they could say they made a contribution to the result. However, the highest performing LAPs after 2009 who benefited from quality improvement of LAP tools and processes perceive that what they are doing matters and that it is making a difference.

We can hypothesize about the probable contribution of a strategy or program by considering the theoretical link based on evidence-based practice and research. For example, it has been strongly supported that quality early education programs lead to significant differences in preparation for school. By proxy, if a group has a strategy to increase the number of pre-K slots in high-quality programs and these slots increase access in a specific community resulting in 20% more children between the ages of three to four years attending, then we can expect to see a difference for these children and the community in one to two years once they have begun kindergarten. With this in mind, we hypothesize that LAP groups have influenced and contributed in ways that will make a difference for targeted populations.

Finding #2: Nearly half of LAP groups extended their work beyond the end of the implementation period. Forty percent of LAPs extended their work for three years or more.

The TOAC model sets in motion a series of events and actions that result in important changes within individuals. By supporting and creating structured learning opportunities for local leaders to come together around a unified set of priorities, participants develop accountability mechanisms and

skills to align strategies for change. The sense of urgency; perception of making a difference; and development of trenchant relationships that support resilience, risk taking, and a willingness to align rather than act independently—form powerful motivation to stay invested. The ultimate testimony is that over half of LAPs sustained efforts with little to no continued investment by the Casey Foundation.

As noted in this table, many of the LAP groups continued to have a sense of urgency to address the targeted result and continued, strengthened, and created new strategies to contribute to accelerating positive outcomes.

LAP Group	Time Continued Past Implementation	Example of Community Change Occurring Past 14 months
MLAP	5 years +	- Continued advocacy at the state level - Majority of individuals on the Governor's Advisory Council to develop plan for Head Start Act are former MLAP members
BLAP	5 years +	- Strengthened programing in cultural institutes - Focused on mental health and developmental services and screenings
AA LAP*	4 years +	Institutionalized at the county level the provision of books prior to infant and mother being discharged. The importance of reading to babies is discussed as part of discharge planning
DeKalb LAP*	4 years +	- Kindergarten transition program - New partnership with the YMCA to implement early education program in a targeted community
Baby LAP	6 months+	Institutionalized priorities in Health Department programming
INDY LAP*	3 years +	- Intensive residential and non-residential services alternative to re-incarceration that is now used by seven major felony courts in the county - New website and database listing resources for ex-offenders in the areas of housing, mental health services, education and substance abuse treatment
Elkhart LAP	1 year +	Moving forward transitional coaching strategy
Mo Co LAP	5 year +	Formed coalition to inform and educate the public about early childhood
**LAP groups that are still meeting and advancing work as of the time of this report		

The flywheel concept espoused in Collin's *Good to Great and the Social Sector (2005)* comes to mind—as leaders build muscle and enough understanding about the problem and their ability to contribute to results—they are able to move the wheel slightly until after several turns, it increases speed, and then creates its own momentum. LAP groups that continue seem to have no one breakthrough moment but steady movement over time. During this period, some LAPs institutionalized their work such as the Maryland LAP that influenced the state's framing of the strategic plan for children entering school ready to learn and Baby LAP that informed the focus on safe sleep in the work that would become B'More for Babies. Other LAPs implemented significant strategies such as Anne Arundel LAP's work to have all families with newborns leave the hospital with a book and substantive changes in programs such as the establishment of an early childhood education program for refugee children in an established community-based refugee program in DeKalb, Georgia—one of the few such programs in the country. Still others continuing LAPs have changed their focus and the model that they are using to implement change; one example being Montgomery Co. who meet twice a year and focus more on informing the community about the importance of early childhood education. So, the type of work that LAPs are involved in after the implementation phase varies in fidelity to the model and influence.

LAPs who maintained highest fidelity—continued singular focus, used data to make decisions and tracked performance, and aligned actions across sectors—were more likely to be higher performing LAPs.

More questions:
1. Are there factors that predict which collaboratives are likely to sustain their work?
2. What is the motivation and inherent reward for continuing LAP work?
3. How do collaboratives create a timeline that is realistic and maintains a sense of urgency?
4. Is the sector composition of sustaining LAPs different from non-sustaining LAPs?

Finding #3: There is emerging evidence that collaborative groups that are accountable— measured as having high action, high alignment and completion of commitments—are more likely to achieve results than groups at low or moderate action even when alignment is high. The composition of the group is likely to matter.

Making and keeping aligned action commitments is a precursor to groups holding themselves accountable to each other and results. Groups who rate themselves as being accountable as measured by completion of commitment are most likely to believe that they have contributed positively to the acceleration of results and there has been a reduction in the incidence of the problem (Littlefield & O'Brien, 2010).

Using a path analysis to determine the specific factors that contributed to a high sense of achievement, it was noted that both participant accountability and collaborative leadership development had significant and positive effects on the establishment of strategies (O'Brien, Littlefield & Goddard-Truitt, 2012). The perception of having good working relationships proved important to developing and implementing strategies. Three of the four groups with the highest sense of accountability and relationship also had strategies that were most aligned with evidenced-based practices.

High alignment and completion of commitments are not enough—commitments must be at the level of high action. High action refers to activity that is executed to create positive effects for a result and community. For example, collaborative groups often spend time understanding the problem and collecting information to establish baselines. This is important work but would be seen as low action. The next level of activity would be using this information to develop concrete plans, engaging important partners or developing materials. For example, if it is deemed that an important factor in children being prepared for school is for them to attend quality prior care, then planning might include advocating for access to such facilities or developing a strategy to increase the number of pre-kindergarten slots for children in select communities. Until these actions actually are implemented and children are enrolled there cannot be a measurable impact. Groups must move from collecting information, to developing solid plans, to executing plans that touch individuals to make a measurable difference. Higher performing LAPs moved from low to high action and executed strategies.

Several factors point to difficulty in moving to execution. In an analysis of action commitments by workgroup, it was noted that alignment improved significantly over time, whereas action only increased over time for some workgroups. This suggests that it is more difficult to improve action scores where groups are moving from pre-planning to planning to execution of strategies, whereas

alignment improves at a quicker pace. The composition of the group also matters. When looking at the quality and performance of collaboratives and impact, alignment and accountability, several differences were found at the sector level. Participants from the government sector had higher quality commitments and they made commitments that were significantly more aligned and effective (Littlefield & O'Brien, 2010). Collaborative composition matters; having a balanced collaborative with members from the private, nonprofit and government sectors can lead to the best group outcomes (Littlefield & O'Brien, 2010).

More questions:
1. What keeps collaborative groups from executing at a high enough scope and scale?
2. What is the correlation between perceived and measurable effects at the population level?
3. Does self-assessment and feedback on strength of action and alignment lead to problem solving to improve implementation of effective strategies at scope and scale?

Finding #4: Accountability is an important lever for producing results
In the simplest sense, accountability is said to imply "answerability," to whom are collaborative leaders answerable—and "responsibility," what is the collaborative obligated to do and achieve. The development of a culture of accountability hinges on the ability for leaders to be accountable and responsible. This is far from a simple task. In fact, it is considered the greatest challenge to collaboratives that lack hierarchical structure and formal authority. Collaborative leaders must develop an accountability structure to support their work. The need to develop a system of accountability is not always recognized by the forming collaborative and even when it is; it is not an easy task. It has been proposed that a lack of accountability within and between multiple organizations, agencies and communities is a factor that contributes to the inability of collaboratives to develop robust strategies and to execute said strategies at a significant scale to make a difference (Littlefield and O'Brien, 2011).

In LAP, the development of a culture of accountability begins with the call to action that establishes the answer to these questions. Individual leaders are invited to be a part of a program that focuses on a specific result measured by a specific set of indicators.

Answerability to. . .	Responsible for. . .
External Stakeholder: Accountability Partner	• Sharing progress towards achieving results (Progress)
Internal Partners: Collaborative Leaders and Self	• Making and keeping commitments, aligning strategies for collective impact, and building collaborative leadership skills (Performance)
Community Members: Defined Population and Community	• Contributing to making a measurable difference for stated result (Result)

Accountability serves an important function in cross-sector collaboratives where no one LAP partner has authority over any other and has no one individual or agency can improve results for a population. LAP leaders are supported in the development of an accountability structure. Participants are coached to write individual and group commitments. Sharing commitments verbally and in written meeting notes allow partners to be aware of each individual's commitments thereby creating an overlapping relationship of accountability that forms the foundation for public

accountability. Meetings are begun by leaders engaging in conversations establishing what has been done, what has not been done and what still matters. The purpose of having accountability dialogues is to normalize such conversations and to maintain forward momentum. These conversations led to transparent and visible conversations and create norms of reciprocity and trustworthiness. While public dialogue has been demonstrated to increase accountability in collaborative groups it is not without risk as it can also lead to increased vulnerability and risk (Roberts, 2002).

Evidence supports that accountability contributes to overall performance of collaborative leaders and influences the ability to move to sustainable aligned action. In LAPs with formal accountability processes increased the likelihood that commitments would be completed by 25% for group commitments and 17% for individual commitments. This demonstrates the importance of such processes for collaborative groups. High-to mid-performing LAPs internalized the use of formal accountability systems. They tracked commitments made by the group more effectively than low performing groups (O'Brien, et. al., 2012). Low performing collaboratives did not embrace the formal accountability system. In survey responses statements suggested that action commitment forms were not used by all members and that it "didn't catch on." These groups reported overall lower accountability and were assessed to be lower performers.

Notably, groups that were assessed as lower performers and lacked strong formal accountability structures had weaker containers, even the one lower performing LAP that was implemented after 2009 where quality improvements had been instituted into the processes. Containers were assessed by considering the accountability partner's capacity to execute within the boundaries of their role, the boundary of authority and role of the leaders and connection to the result, and the implementation team and establishment of a container that supported the work of leaders.

To establish strong accountability systems collaborative leaders should have a method of recording commitments. While recording commitments is important, the likelihood of keeping commitments is connected to holding public accountability. Both verbally sharing intended actions and having a means of tracking commitments creates public awareness of what is being done and not done and provides a sense of how actions are aligned within and across groups. Finally, leaders must engage in transparent dialogue to discuss progress towards achievement of results. Heterarchical collaborative groups must ultimately own and internalize the accountability structure used in their work. To establish accountability the leaders need a container that is strong enough to support the adaptive challenges that arises from this work and the capacity to manage discomfort and conflict.

More questions:
1. What are the minimal characteristics of the Call, Container, and Capacity to Collaborate that supports members of a RBL program to establish a strong accountability system that is owned by the leaders?
2. What differentiates leaders' experiences where accountability assumes importance or not?

Finding #5: The efficient and effective use of power and authority remains an adaptive challenge and intrinsically linked to "picking up" one's leadership to take action and to influence work in one's home agency and areas of influence.

Relationship variables that include both relationship and power/conflict are essential to the collaboration process as they are antecedents to other important process variables such as decision-

14

making and accountability (Littlefield & O'Brien, 2012). Collaborative leadership development provided skills that helped with the overall process of collaboration as well as helped individuals make decisions around aligned strategies to move work forward. Findings from Littlefield and O'Brien (2012) suggest:

- Managing power and conflict leads to relationship building that leads to effective decision-making.
- Collaborative leadership development has direct effects on relationships and a small but significant effect on power/conflict management.
- Conflict and conflict variable issues were significant issues with lower performing groups who reported experiencing unmanageable and sometimes destructive conflict.

Participants recognized power and authority issues in the room. Individuals examined and commented on other leaders' roles noticing hierarchical position and authority outside of LAP and assessed how this impacted their ability to "play" inside the LAP. There was a delicate balance of wanting to see "peers" and the excitement of working across hierarchical structures. Overt statements were made about what could and could not be accomplished based on who was in the room; this impacted people's thinking about engagement in collaborative work. For other's they wondered about what they could bring to the table. One service provider said, "I never thought I could sit with a prosecutor… you know the Deputy Director and Supervisor of Public Safety are people that I wouldn't have thought would ever consider my point of view and I'm realizing they're probably closer to me than the people I've been working with on this issue." This sentiment was echoed in LAPs where representatives from lead child serving public agencies were in the room with directors and intermediaries of smaller programs. Invariably, leaders from public agencies expressed appreciation for what community-based programs and non-profit organizations brought to the table.

Managing these dynamics within the container is extremely important. Leaders perceived that the RBF coach/facilitator impacted the power/conflict variable by skillfully working with groups to make consensus-based decisions and to tolerate ambiguity of not having "the" answer. Being supported through the hard work of initially saying yes to the invitation, accepting insufficiency of data and developing relationships around a result helped to equalize power and perceived imbalances (Littlefield & O'Brien, 2012).

The ability of LAP leaders to manage issues related to power and authority is essential in developing collaborative relationships and trust. In cross-sector collaboratives there can be histories at the system-level that interferes with individuals working effectively and perceived power plays can ensue. This possibility is normalized within LAP and leaders are supported in addressing issues and finding places where they agree—often because the work centers on the result and deep discussions around role and system take place. The ability to manage and negotiate a shared agenda and aligned contributions provide a scaffold for leaders to join. As noted previously, collaborative efforts that balanced membership from the private, nonprofit and government sectors led to the best group outcomes (Littlefield & O'Brien, 2010). This work sets the stage for the partnerships required to successfully collaborate. Partnering overall leads to better outcomes. So the more people work with partners from various sectors, the higher alignment, accountability and action are (Littlefield, O'Brien & Hershey, 2011).

Leaders perceptions about their authority and power to create change also influences their willingness or ability to accelerate activities in their home agencies that will contribute to improved results. Documenting the difference that leaders have made overall in their home agencies has been difficult. In each of the continuing LAPs, you can see progress in several individuals using tools and leadership skills personally; however, there is not an indication that deep changes occurred at all levels of their organization. In addition, several individuals went back home and did substantial things like serving a different population or starting new programs; but this did not occur at a high percentage—a rough estimate is that approximately 10%-20% of leaders may have made changes in their home agencies overall. The ability of leaders to "lead from the middle" and implement sustained change in their home agencies, seems at best elusive.

More questions
1. What are the factors that led to some leaders creating aligned actions and integrating practices and tools in their home agencies?
2. What do we know about the balance of the members based on hierarchical authority in their home agencies? What are the types of strategies that are most effectively implemented and taken to scale (i.e., MLAP and Indy LAP had public sector participation and was able to accelerate policy and procedural changes; DeKalb created greater momentum in targeted programs)?
3. How important is it that leaders create changes in their home agencies?

Finding #6: The TOAC provides a creditable model to understand the importance of building the capacity of leaders to collaborate to obtain substantial results.

The TOAC predicts that leaders with a set of competencies are able to have a disciplined focus on a result and develop an accountability structure that allows collaborative partners who hold no hierarchical authority with each other to make decisions together and mobilize aligned actions at a scope and scale to make a measurable difference. Evidence supports that to varying degrees LAP leaders were able to influence others across sectors, disciplines, and fields to align strategies to improve the well-being of individuals, families, and communities. They leveraged both relationships and resources to influence programs inside and outside of their home agencies. In Maryland and Indiana, these changes contribute to improved outcomes for children entering school ready to learn and ex-offenders reintegrating into their communities. Recidivism rates are down in Indianapolis and Maryland has integrated strategies and strategic directions that continue to inform the planning of early childhood education and care.

The TOAC included a model to build the capacity of leaders to work collaboratively. The model required a call to action, capacity building within four competencies, and the development of a container in which leaders could do the difficult work of applying skills to align actions and make decisions about what the group would do and for what is would hold itself accountable. Findings related to these three conditions follow (O'Brien et. al., 2012):

Call to Action: The call to action is issued by the accountability partner (AP) who identifies the result and indicator of success and then invites leaders from multiple sectors to join the work of improve outcomes for communities. Beyond this, the AP exerts no input into the work of the LAP

16

group. The AP is provided information periodically by the group and creates an opportunity for public accountability where the LAP members share progress on results. The AP keeps the result at the forefront in the community and may open doors for leaders if requested (i.e., provide an opportunity to discuss progress or needs with a citywide council). Findings suggest that this "hands off" approach to helping leaders own their work was successful (O'Brien et. al. 2012).

- LAP leaders positive perceptions of the AP positively impact perceptions and awareness of participant accountability within LAP.
- However, the effects are indirect. Leaders do not relate their abilities to develop accountability structures and make and keep commitments to the AP; instead, these are attributes that they see as being generated from the group. This demonstrates that while the call to action is important as an impetus for leaders to work collaboratively, there is not a need or desire for heavy oversight from the AP. LAPs that relied heavily on the authority of the AP did not create strong strategies for moving their work forward.

Container: The implementation team creates and maintains the environment in which LAP leaders meet to engage in their work and apply collaborative leadership skills in real-time. This container is designed to create a space that is safe from outside influence and equalizes power and authority. RBF coach facilitators (CFs) maintain a neutral stance and give the work to the group to do while helping them to use data, discuss disparate outcomes, manage conflicts, tolerate ambiguity, make decisions, and hold themselves and each other accountable for aligned actions and results. What we have found regarding the container is (O'Brien et. al., 2012):

- Positive evaluation of the implementation team's skill directly leads to greater perceived accountability within the LAP group and to improved collaborative leadership development of LAP participants.
- Highly skilled implementation teams help participants create accountability that is characterized by strong working relationships and timely progress on tasks.
- Highly skilled implementation teams develop collaborative leadership tools that enable participants to gain a better understanding of the problem they are tackling, gain new skills, and form strong and useful relationships regarding the collaborative work.
- Where others hypothesize that several years are needed to develop strong working relationships, relationships can be accelerated with more frequent and intense meetings where the implementation team manages a container that equalizes decision-making and provides participants with the skills to equalize power imbalances.

Capacity to Collaborate: The building of skills in the four competencies is the core of the work in LAP. Learning occurs using an experiential approach where leaders are provided with skills and tools through practice within the context of their own work, reflection, and theory, and then continued application outside of the container. The TOAC makes the assertion that learning in this way, with facilitators who remain neutral, allows the leaders to own the work and build enduring relationships fashioned to address the social problem at hand. Evidence bears this out (O'Brien et. al., 2012):

- There is not a direct effect of perceived quality of the implementation teams and the quality of the actual work. The implementation team provides the structure and support for LAP; it does not do the work of LAP leaders.

- These findings suggest that together, accountability and collaborative leadership skills can lead to effective collaboratives (as evidenced by the stronger and more aligned strategies), and that these strategies are sufficient in producing change at the community-level.
- Descriptive data shows that the majority of LAP groups made sufficient commitments and decisions to implement aligned strategies between sessions four and six.
- Collaborative leadership skills not only add to the effects of accountability for improving the productivity of collaboratives, but also have a direct effect on community-level changes that occur beyond the scope of the collaborative. Put simply, investing in these skills is likely to create a stronger impact and longer-lasting change to organizations and social problems within communities.

The TOAC predicts that for leaders to effectively collaborate they must focus on a single result and build a system of accountability. Collaborative leadership skills that allow them to use data, work collaboratively, leverage relationships and formal and informal authority to get things done between meetings helps them to be in high action and alignment as a team. The importance of the call to action from an influential leadership group that then allows the leaders to set the course for actions created the urgency and desire to engage in the work without creating a dependency. Similarly, the efficacy of leaders to effect a positive change increased as they built collaborative skills that helped them to own their work. Creating ownership relied heavily on the ability of the RBF CF to maintain neutrality, support the group in addressing issues of power and authority, and encouraging ownership of their work. The implementation team role in creating a container that provides adequate sense of safety and equalizes power in the room is important to leaders.

More questions:
1. What are the minimal characteristics of the AP that can issue a strong call to action?
2. The trajectory of change in collaborative leadership competencies has been difficult to measure. How might changes over time be reliably captured?
3. In the lowest functioning LAPs, what aspect of the change model could have been mediated or strengthened? What would be the most effective means of improving overall performance?

Recommendations

In addition to sharing key findings and lessons learned, the purpose of this report is to offer recommendations that lead to the quality improvement of RBL programs with a particular emphasis on leader effectiveness. To be successful and effective when engaging in a collaboration whereby authority and accountability are shared among multiple stakeholders, we recommend meeting the following three criteria:

CONTENT OF RBL COLLABORATIVE LEADERSHIP DEVELOPMENT PROGRAMS

Recommendation #1: Collaborative work must be focused in a disciplined manner on results, but for leaders to be in high action and alignment to make a measurable difference, they must have a set of collaborative leadership skills that that support their capacity to collaborate.

Sharing an agenda is important in maintaining a disciplined focus on results. As such, leaders must have a specific skill set to be able to move to action together. Leveraging informal authority is essential given that participants must lead in an environment where authority is shared. Collaborative initiatives exist "outside the lines of formal authority" otherwise known as bureaucracy, to which most actors are accustomed (Meier & O'Toole, 2001, p. 272). Therefore, participants must establish protocols that support a heterarchical arrangement and avoid employing skills, tools, and strategies that work in a more traditional organizational setting, but rather acquire, develop, and leverage the skills, tools, and strategies necessary to be effective in collaboration (O'Brien, Littlefield, & Goddard-Truitt, 2012; Littlefield and O'Brien, 2011; Queen, 2011).

Recommendation #2: Institute a virtuous cycle to create an accountability structure that creates shared accountability and relationship building.
Leadership, at every level, is necessary to establish an effective system of accountability. Relationships are integral to effective leadership and healthy working relationships are essential to a successful collaborative experience. Leaders working together must rely on one another and establish a system of accountability to answer the call to action effectively. This system is likened unto a virtuous cycle, whereby strategies are implemented and a feedback loop is set up to allow for continuous assessment and improvements. The following are three necessary activities to ensure fidelity to the accountability model.

- *Document action commitments to lay the foundation for shared accountability and relationship building.* Documenting actions creates transparency and opportunities to build trust, as leaders rely on one another to fulfill individual and group commitments established in service of a result. Individuals make an action commitment and openly share with others so that they may hold themselves and the group accountable. As such, the impetus for ownership and shared accountability is created allowing leaders to understand, from an individual and whole group perspective, what it takes to implement strategies and influence results.

- *Engage in accountability dialogues to accelerate action and achieve alignment.* Use the accountability pathway tool to engage in an accountability conversation that identifies the actions that have been completed, the actions still in queue, the actions that present challenges, and the actions that have been denied an opportunity for completion. This conversation is not easy to have among peers because it makes visible the members who are not meeting commitments or making contributions that are significant to achieving results. As a result, these patterns of behaviors can cause tension in the group. However, leaders can leverage their informal authority, use effective questions, and facilitate a conversation that will help move them to making decisions about how to move forward together and accelerate their work. Ultimately, the accountability conversation is employed as a vehicle to get results, rather than as a means to place blame.

- *Track and test strategies to verify their effectiveness.* Implementing the most effective strategies requires leaders to adopt a set of performance measures that indicate the quantity and quality of their efforts and progress toward having an effect on the result. If strategies are ineffective, leaders must demonstrate flexibility and the ability to manage the adaptive challenge of having to change mid-course.

Recommendation #3: Support collaborative leaders to create role clarity and the ability to tolerate solution ambiguity. Collaborating across sectors requires leaders to strike a balance between their own interest and those of others. LAP leaders often speak of "taking off their hat" for advocating on-behalf of their agency's interest and "taking up" the collective task and result of the group. This is a big moment for leaders who are use to working in silos and being in competitive relationships. For this new stance to work, leaders must identify what their contribution can be to achieve the shared agenda to accelerate results. Leaders are supported in understanding their role and their authority in role to achieve results. Leaders consider what they bring to the work, how this relates to the work inside and outside of the LAP and how systems influence their role and work. Role clarity is an important part of the early work of LAP leaders. This will relate closely to the individual contributions that leaders will make within group. Subsequently, a leader becomes comfortable leveraging the authority that accompanies their role and working in service of a result (Queen, 2011).

While role clarity is important for leaderships to align contributions, they must be able to tolerate solution ambiguity. The nature of the adaptive work in achieving results for social problems requires leaders to tolerate ambiguity and not having answers. The LAP prepares leaders to differentiate technical and adaptive challenges and to regulate stress so as to tolerate the discomfort of not knowing the solutions, having to change long-standing practices and to be able to mobilize others to work and maintain forward momentum in the face of uncertainty.

PROCESS OF RBL COLLABORATIVE LEADERSHIP DEVELOPMENT PROGRAMS

Recommendation 4: Provide Support for an Implementation Team. "Grantmakers wanting to develop and support self-sustaining cross-sector collaboratives should provide an implementation team for a predetermined period of time to work with the collaborative in a neutral but structured manner (O'Brien, et. al., 2012). The implementation team should not direct the key decisions or strategies of the collaborative. However, it should be deeply involved in the support and capacity building of the collaborative as a working group. The implementation team should include note-takers who at a minimum document the key decisions of the collaborative and the specific commitments of the individual collaborative participants. Documenting the decisions helps groups maintain forward momentum, stick to decisions made and avoid circular discussions, and create a record of commitments made and kept as they focus on performance and being in high action and alignment together. The written, public account of action commitments serves as the basis for the accountability dialogue.

Recommendation 5: Incorporate an accountability partner to issue the call to action and support cross-sector collaborative groups In making funding decisions, grantmakers should support collaboratives whose call to action is issued by a body of influential high-level community leaders who are connected to the result. The accountability partner supports the group in a "hands-off" manner—keeping the result in the forefront of the community, supporting requests of the group, and being present when the community is informed of progress towards the result. When AP collaborative group members feel positive toward the AP, there is an indirect impact of how they engage in the work and hold accountability individually.

Conclusions

Investing time, money, and relational resources to build the capacity of leaders to collaborate is a smart investment. Findings from the quality improvement and research project completed over the past three years provide evidence that leaders who know how to collaborate effectively can make a measureable difference for communities, families, and children. The TOAC predicts that leaders who maintain urgent and disciplined attention around a common result build strong collaborative skills and relationships that support forward momentum. The skilled-based approach to developing the capacity of leaders led to improved performance and the ability to hold individual and public accountability. Leaders aligned actions across sectors and moved to action. Where leaders were in high alignment and action, measurable differences occurred at the program-level and in a few cases at the population level. The use of RBF facilitators and a strong container provided the opportunity for leaders to engage in the adaptive work of change. High performing LAP groups had an increased sense of making a measurable difference than lower performing LAP groups. The importance of giving the work to the group and creating ownership relied heavily on the ability of the RBF CF to maintain neutrality and the implementation team to create a container that equalizes power in the room. The combination of the findings, lessons learned, and recommendations serve as a blueprint for facilitating opportunities for collaborative leaders to build their capacity to work together to have greater influence and leverage within their communities that improve conditions of well-being.

Collaborative leadership skills enable cross-sector leaders to share knowledge and resources, build cooperative relationships that provide the impetus to create a shared agenda, have a multi-perspective understanding of the social problem being addressed, and use new skills related to decision-making and problem solving. To get big results for complex social problems require the actions of cross-sector leaders working collaboratively with a disciplined focus on results and with an urgency that supersedes their individual agendas. To do this leaders must have a specific set of skills that improve their ability to collaborate. Leaders in the LAP programs developed the capacity to navigate complex relationships to get things done that made a positive difference for the well-being of communities.

References

Bryson, J. M., Crosby, B. C., & Stone, M. M. (2006). The Design and Implementation of Cross-Sector Collaborations: Propositions from the Literature. *Public Administration Review*, Special Issue: 44-55.

Collins, J. (2005). Good to Great and the Social Sector: A Monograph to Accompany Good to Great. Harper Collins Publishers, NY.

Huxham, C., & Vangen, S. (2005). *Managing to Collaborate: the Theory and Practice of Collaborative Advantage.* New York: Routledge.

Kania, J. & Kramer, M. (2011). Collective Impact, *Stanford Social Innovation Review, Winter 2011.*

Littlefield, J., O'Brien, J. & Hersey, L., *Participant or Spectator? Nonprofit Engagement in Multi-Sector Collaboratives.* Paper presented at the annual conference for the American Society for Public Administration, Baltimore, Maryland, March 11–15, 2011.

Littlefield, J. & O'Brien, J. *Playing Well with Others: Nonprofit Participation in Cross-Sector Collaboratives.* Paper presented at the annual conference for the Association for Research on Nonprofit and Voluntary Action, Washington, DC, November 17–20, 2010.

Littlefield, J. & O'Brien, J. *In the Pursuit of Public Value: The Process Behind Cross-sector Collaboratives.* Paper presented at the Center for Integrative Leadership's Conference Shared-Power World, September 20–22, 2012.

Littlefield, J. & O'Brien, J. *Policymaking through Collaborative Networks: Issues of Accountability and Performance.* Poster presented at the annual conference for the Association for Public Policy Analysis and Management, Boston, Massachusetts, November 4–6, 2010.

Littlefield, J., O'Brien, J., & Hersey, L. *Sector Collaboratives: The Impact of Partnerships and Sector Composition on Performance Paper submitted to ASPA, 2011)*

O'Brien, J., Littlefield, J. & Goddard-Truitt, V. (2012). *Why Leadership?* Accepted for publication in Foundation Review. Not for circulation.

Pillsbury, J., Goddard-Truitt, V. & Littlefield, J. *Cross-Sector Performance Accountability: Making Aligned Contributions to Improve Community Well-Being.* Panel presentation at the American Society for Public Administration Conference, Miami, FL, 2009.

Queen, J. (2011). The adaptive challenges of collaborative leaders in a public-private partnership. University of Maryland, College Park.

Roberts, N. (2002). Keeping Public Officials Accountable through Dialogue: Resolving the Accountability Paradox, *Public Administrative* Review (62) 6, 658-669.

Roberts, N.., and Bradley, R. T. (1991). Stakeholder Collaboration and Innovation: A Study of

Public Policy Initiation at the State Level. Journal of Applied Behavioral Science 27(2): 209-27.

Thomson, A.M. & Perry J. L. (2006). Collaboration Processes: Inside the Black Box *Public Administration Review*, 66, 20-32.