



# Creating Resident-Led Governance Structures

A MAKING CONNECTIONS PEER TECHNICAL ASSISTANCE MATCH  
BETWEEN BOSTON, MASSACHUSETTS AND PHILADELPHIA, PENNSYLVANIA  
PEER TECHNICAL ASSISTANCE LEADS TO ACTION

*Part of a Series from the  
Technical Assistance Resource  
Center of the Annie E. Casey  
Foundation and the Center  
for the Study of Social Policy*

©2003, The Annie E. Casey Foundation, Baltimore, Maryland.

***The Annie E. Casey Foundation***

*The Annie E. Casey Foundation is a private charitable organization dedicated to helping build better futures for disadvantaged children in the United States. It was established in 1948 by Jim Casey, one of the founders of United Parcel Service, and his siblings, who named the Foundation in honor of their mother. The primary mission of the Foundation is to foster public policies, human-service reforms, and community supports that more effectively meet the needs of today's vulnerable children and families. In pursuit of this goal, the Foundation makes grants that help states, cities, and neighborhoods fashion more innovative, cost-effective responses to these needs. For more information, visit the Foundation's website at [www.aecf.org](http://www.aecf.org).*

***Center for the Study of Social Policy***

*The Center for the Study of Social Policy, based in Washington, D.C., was established in 1979 with the goal of providing public policy analysis and technical assistance to states and localities. The Center's work is concentrated in the areas of family and children's services, income supports, neighborhood-based services, education reform, family support, community decision-making, and human resource innovations. The Center manages peer technical assistance as part of the Foundation's Technical Assistance Resource Center (TARC).*

# CONTENTS

BACKGROUND .....	2
SETTING THE CONTEXT FOR THE MATCH .....	2
Mattapan Community Partnership .....	4
Germantown Settlement .....	6
THE CONSULTATION .....	7
I. Germantown Settlement: History and Structure.....	8
II. A Resident Leadership Model .....	10
III. Resident Engagement, Community Organizing, and Collaboration: Successes and Challenges .....	13
IV. Strengthening Resident Leadership Skills.....	16
V. Resource Development .....	18
VI. Youth Leadership and Involvement .....	19
LESSONS LEARNED AND NEXT STEPS .....	20
Mattapan Community Partnership .....	20
WHAT IS <i>MAKING CONNECTIONS</i> ? .....	22
WHAT ARE PEER MATCHES? .....	23

## BACKGROUND

Through the *Making Connections* initiative, the Annie E. Casey Foundation is working with Boston, Philadelphia, and 20 other communities across the country to strengthen neighborhoods and support families. One of the principal aims of *Making Connections* is to link neighborhood residents to the economic opportunities, social networks, and effective services that will improve the lives and well-being of children and their families.

Owing to the effective  
resident leadership  
strategies demonstrated by  
Germantown Settlement  
and the GCCB, MCP  
participants acquired  
valuable new information  
and tools that will assist  
them in building their own  
capacities around inclusive  
community building.

As part of this initiative, the Foundation offers the participating communities access to technical assistance that will help them achieve their goals for strengthening families in a neighborhood context. Peer technical assistance, which allows the sites to capitalize on the practical knowledge that emerges from innovators in other places, is a particularly valuable resource these communities can use to address issues and solve problems they have identified in their own neighborhoods.

From July 19–20, 2001, a group of people from the Mattapan Community Partnership in Boston, Massachusetts, met with colleagues from the Germantown Settlement in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania, to exchange ideas for creating resident-led governance structures in Boston. This report summarizes what was learned at that meeting and next steps that the Mattapan Community Partnership plans to undertake to realize its vision. For more information about *Making Connections* and peer matches, see page 22.

## SETTING THE CONTEXT FOR THE MATCH

The Boston *Making Connections* site team first became active in Mattapan—a neighborhood of 25,000 people located just south of the city’s downtown section—through the relationship it has developed with the United Way of Massachusetts Bay, one of the largest investors in the Mattapan Community Partnership (MCP). Established in 1999, MCP serves as a catalyst for local collective planning, decision-making, and community-building efforts.

Although Mattapan actually falls outside the official *Making Connections* neighborhood boundaries, site team members have long viewed the community as an important place to invest in because of its close proximity to targeted areas and the similarity between local issues. In addition, they recognized that the United Way and MCP are trying to support families in ways that are consistent with and complementary to the Boston *Making Connections* agenda. Thus, the site team offered MCP a \$30,000 planning grant in response to a proposal MCP submitted involving a plan to recruit and train neighborhood residents to serve as “community ambassadors.”

As it is envisioned, MCP’s Community Ambassadors Program is very similar to a resident-led governance structure created by Germantown Settlement—a multi-purpose human services agency charged with implementing the Annie E. Casey Foundation’s Rebuilding Communities Initiative (RCI) in the Lower Germantown neighborhood of Philadelphia, Pennsylvania. Launched in 1994, RCI was a seven-year initiative designed to provide the supports needed to help transform troubled, economically disenfranchised neighborhoods into safe, supportive, and productive environments for children, youth, and their families. The Foundation worked in partnership with community-based organizations on comprehensive strategies to reverse social isolation and disinvestment in low-income neighborhoods.

Given both the similarity between the Mattapan and Germantown resident leadership work and Germantown Settlement’s strong, existing relationship with the Foundation, the Boston *Making Connections* site team suggested that MCP arrange a peer match with the Germantown Settlement to learn more about their model and strategies. Because *Making Connections* continues to build on principles that have historically been a part of the Foundation’s work, MCP was able to successfully seek and obtain helpful guidance from an organization responsible for leading an earlier Casey Foundation initiative.

The Mattapan Community Partnership in Boston, Massachusetts, is located in a culturally diverse, low-income neighborhood that is facing many of the same social and economic challenges as those being successfully addressed by Germantown

Settlement in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania. Representatives from these two organizations came together for a peer match to discuss strategies, experiences, and lessons learned related to:

- Developing a resident-led governance structure;
- Creating consensus among stakeholders with respect to identifying and pursuing neighborhood priorities;
- Developing outreach and recruitment strategies designed to engage “hard to reach” community members;
- Building resident leadership capacity;
- Formulating effective community organizing strategies; and
- Involving youth in community-building activities.

## Mattapan Community Partnership

The Mattapan Community Partnership’s (MCP) governing body is comprised of 18 people who represent community-based organizations, businesses, and faith-based institutions. Its members originally came together as a part of a community stakeholder focus group convened by the United Way of Massachusetts Bay to identify opportunities for neighborhood improvement. Motivated by those initial discussions, participants decided to establish a formal organization that would continue to work toward building a more empowered, safer, healthier, and vibrant community.

Once a predominantly Jewish neighborhood, Mattapan experienced a rapid influx of African-American residents during the 1960s that was largely attributable to bank and real estate redlining practices. Today, 88 percent of local residents are people of color—including a large number of immigrants from various Caribbean and African countries as well as fast-growing segments of Asian and Hispanic families.

Although Mattapan is ethnically and racially diverse, most residents are part of the “struggling working class.” Despite the fact that many families have members who are employed in more than one job, the neighborhood’s average, per capita household income is one of the lowest in Boston. With respect to community health, local incidents of homicide among males ages 15–24 and cancer mortality rates are among the highest in the city. In addition, the neighborhood needs significant improvements in education and youth development services to promote the well-being of young people who account for nearly 28 percent of Mattapan residents.

Traditionally, human services and community development organizations have not been recognized as a strong presence in the neighborhood. However, a host of religious institutions, neighborhood associations, health programs, and immigrant organizations are actively involved in addressing local needs.

MCP seeks to build on the strengths of neighborhood stakeholders by maximizing community involvement and resources. It is also committed to building on family assets by honoring ethnic, religious, and cultural diversity. Ultimately, MCP seeks to achieve the following within the Mattapan community:

- Improved networking and coordination among human services providers to increase the quality and accessibility of community services;
- Increased opportunities for residents and local businesses to become actively involved in community-building projects designed to create an infrastructure for mobilization and promote empowerment; and
- The development of collaborative community support networks.

In pursuit of this vision, MCP is currently developing a Community Ambassador Program (CAP). Under CAP, neighborhood block captains will be recruited and trained to help engage residents in leadership development efforts. Because German-town Settlement has successfully implemented an effective resident-led governance structure, MCP sought to learn more about the agency’s community organizing and capacity-building strategies.

## Germantown Settlement

Located in northwest Philadelphia, Germantown Settlement is a multipurpose, nonprofit human service agency committed to enhancing the quality of life for more than 195,000 low-to-moderate income residents of the Greater Germantown community. Toward this end, it has instituted a comprehensive service delivery system that seeks to build upon the assets of both the neighborhood and local residents. More than 15,000 people are served annually through programs in: youth development and leadership, family development and preservation, preventative health care, housing, employment and training, energy conservation, aging, education, and community development.

In addition, Germantown Settlement has put in place broad-based initiatives specifically designed to engage residents in leading the development of policies and programs that affect their lives. These initiatives are described below.

- The *Lower Germantown Rebuilding Community Project (LGRCP)* is a multi-year revitalization effort aimed at improving the health and well-being of children and families in Germantown. Funded as part of the Annie E. Casey Foundation's Rebuilding Communities Initiative, LGRCP assists residents in building the skills necessary to assess local needs and create viable solutions to issues they identify.
- The *Living in Neighborhood Kinship (LINK) Development* is a 42-month initiative managed by the Greater Germantown Housing Development Corporation—a subsidiary of Germantown Settlement that specializes in affordable housing, real estate ventures, and other economic development activities—and the Wister Neighborhood Council, a grassroots affiliate of Germantown Settlement. Under LINK, community organizing and planning are being integrated with supportive social services and physical development projects to create a model development agenda that will eventually be replicated throughout Germantown.

“You can't just be a social organization... you've got to be political in your way. What matters most is supporting the best candidate for your agenda and community.”

Richard Butler, President,  
Dogtown Civic Association



Both LGRCP and LINK are guided by the Germantown Community Collaborative Board (GCCB), a resident-led body of neighborhood stakeholders created to oversee the planning and governance of local community-building activities. As a result, Germantown Settlement's efforts to promote revitalization and connect people with economic opportunities are grounded in an agenda that originated within and is driven by the community.

## THE CONSULTATION

The peer match took place from July 19–20, 2001, at the Germantown Settlement headquarters in Philadelphia. Following a welcome from the GCCB president, participants introduced themselves and described their expectations for the match. To begin the session, state representative and local resident John Meyers spoke about the challenges associated with promoting community-building within the political arena. Agency staff then provided a detailed overview of Germantown Settlement's resident leadership model before guiding the MCP team on a neighborhood tour. Participants visited several settlement programs and facilities including the Mature Adult Center, Charter Middle School, Family Center, and HIV/AIDS education and outreach program. The tour group also surveyed several of the housing and physical redevelopment initiatives managed by the Greater Germantown Housing Development Corporation.

Emanuel V. Freeman, the president and CEO of Germantown Settlement, joined the meeting during lunch to brief participants on the organization's history and structure. Next, the discussion turned to successes and obstacles the settlement has experienced while working to promote resident leadership.

Later in the day, the MCP team was invited to sit in on a GCCB meeting concerning data collection strategies. The networking and sharing continued well into the evening as GCCB members hosted the group for dinner and jazz at a downtown Philadelphia restaurant.

The second day began with a segment on community organizing and collaboration led by local residents and GCCB neighborhood partners. The remainder of the day was spent exploring resident capacity-building activities such as leadership development; outcome measurement, documentation, and marketing; resource development; and youth involvement.

## I. Germantown Settlement: History and Structure

Founded in 1884 by the wives of German immigrants who settled on the outskirts of Philadelphia, Germantown Settlement originally opened as a nursery school and kindergarten for the children of working mothers. Following the Great Depression and the closing of many local factories during the 1940s, the agency began organizing neighborhood councils to advocate for better housing and jobs. By the early 1950s, it had launched its first public housing and community-planning projects.

However, the 1960s brought about a major transitional period for the organization. Because of the rapid growth in Germantown's African-American population after World War II, the settlement could no longer continue to focus solely on the white, middle-income residents it had traditionally served. Spurred on by activist groups such as the Young Afro Americans and the Brickyard Youth Council, the agency created its first youth employment, anti-drug, and violence prevention programs. Yet, it was not until 1972 that Emanuel Freeman, the current president and chief executive officer of Germantown Settlement, succeeded in becoming the first African-American member of the agency's board of directors. His election to the board marked the start of a new era—one where community development and community organizing would emerge as the primary focus of settlement activities.

Throughout the next two decades, many of the white and more affluent residents continued to move away from Germantown. As the neighborhood has undergone major demographic changes, Germantown Settlement has evolved along with it. Currently, its staff (70 percent of whom live in Germantown) and many of the civic

groups that comprise the agency’s network reflect a local population that is now predominantly African American. Nonetheless, the community’s racial, ethnic, and economic diversity remains clearly visible—with average, annual household incomes varying between \$9,000 and \$30,000 across the neighborhood.

During the 1980s and 1990s, labor market shifts and a growing drug epidemic contributed to dramatic increases in local school dropout rates, violence, delinquency, and abandoned properties. In response to these challenges, Germantown Settlement has significantly expanded the scope of its family, youth, housing, and economic development services.

In spite of its enormous growth, the agency remains steadfastly committed to ensuring that local citizens serve as the true agents of change. As reinforcement toward this aim, the settlement regularly looks to national and regional community-building networks as a source of helpful guidance and technical assistance.

#### Keys Issues and Lessons Learned

- *By deliberately seeking to expand its in-house operations, Germantown Settlement has created jobs for residents and been able to shape the delivery of resources in ways that transfer new skills to the community and minimize dependence upon outside technicians.* However, the agency’s continued growth has made it difficult to ensure consistency in practice and approach across all of its operations—especially since staff members are now more likely to focus only on limited aspects of its broad agenda.
- *There is no better way to achieve consensus around organizational objectives than to spend time going into a neighborhood and talking with people about their lives.* Connecting directly with residents also enhances an agency’s understanding of how to leverage the social capital within a community, as opposed to designing a program it hopes people will respond to in a positive way.
- *Physical development should be driven by a sense of people’s desires and needs, not an organization’s economic priorities.* Through its affiliation with the Wister Neighborhood Council, the Southwest Germantown Neighborhood

“It takes a great effort for everyone to come together. You don’t get things done by talking about each other... you’ve got to stay focused on the positive and try to include — not exclude.”

Richard Butler, President,  
Dogtown Civic Association

“We all are urban planners. If you need parking spaces, talk to property owners about opening up their space. Then you take a percentage of whatever profit is made and give it back to the community... maybe set aside hours when the parking spaces can serve as a basketball court for kids in the community. If I wanted my house painted, I’d start thinking about how to get a grant for anybody in the neighborhood who wants to do the same, and I’d figure out how youth could be paid to come and paint houses.”

Arthur Johnson,  
Pomona Cherokee Civic Association

Partnership, and other local community groups, Germantown Settlement actively seeks inside knowledge of the community’s needs and concerns when embarking upon real estate projects.

- *Fostering strong connections with public officials is critical, but agencies should be guided by the substance of what policymakers are doing rather than partisan politics.*
- *Community-building efforts benefit from participation in national networks.* The valuable insight Germantown Settlement has gained from its connections with national networks has helped to broaden its own vision of what is possible to achieve.

## II. A Resident Leadership Model

Germantown Settlement has long been an enthusiastic proponent of the notion that neighborhood improvement efforts should originate within and be guided by the community. Thus, its decision to establish the Germantown Community Collaborative Board (GCCB)—a largely autonomous, resident-driven organization—to manage the Lower Germantown Rebuilding Community Project (LGRCP) was in keeping with the agency’s vision and mission.

As the centerpiece to Germantown’s community-building approach, the GCCB’s primary role is to promote community participation in the planning and management of local revitalization activities. To ensure community ownership of the neighborhood agendas, residents represent 51 percent of the GCCB’s 47-member board, which also includes representatives from business, government, private institutions, and Germantown Settlement.

### Origins of the GCCB

In creating the GCCB, Germantown Settlement spent several months planning and conducting outreach to targeted neighborhoods. From the beginning, each aspect of the initiative was community-driven—with special attention given to building the leadership skills and capacities of local residents.

- *Germantown Settlement first sought to gain a true sense of the community and assess the dynamics of past revitalization efforts.* Agency staff also understood that the process of bringing together different neighborhood factions, creating a resident-driven governing body, and building requisite leadership skills among community members would be a long-term, resource-intensive endeavor. Rather than go about this work in a rushed manner, the settlement submitted a proposal to the Annie E. Casey Foundation requesting that the nine-month LGRCP planning period be extended for another year.
- *To ensure the GCCB's credibility, Germantown Settlement decided against creating a formal vehicle comprised of handpicked planners.* Instead, residents who considered themselves to be neighborhood leaders—whether appointed or self-appointed—were invited to offer suggestions about who else needed to participate in the planning process.
- *The definition of community boundaries was organic.* Three neighborhood sectors were initially identified as LGRCP target areas. However, project boundaries were eventually expanded to five sectors in response to criticism from two areas that bordered Lower Germantown. Rather than exclude those neighborhoods, planners chose to revamp the definition of Lower Germantown.
- LGRCP focus issues were organized around three elements:
  - Organizational and neighborhood capacity building (supporting and strengthening neighborhoods and community-based organizations);
  - Community organizing, planning, and development (mobilizing residents to take action in their neighborhoods); and
  - Reform of public/private systems (creating more effective schools, responsive government, and accessible health care, employment opportunities, and affordable housing for local children and families).
- *Ample time was devoted to solidifying a resident-driven agenda and infrastructure before seeking the input and resources of formal stakeholders.* Community

“Some of the GCCB’s efforts were planned, some were good, and some were failures...but the GCCB isn’t afraid to fail...it just keeps moving and going forward because it has put in the work to become truly in sync with the community.”

Herdius (Ben) Jackson,  
President, GCCB

members waited six months before inviting public system representatives to participate in the planning process. By then, they had forged strong relationships and were able to speak with a powerful, united voice.

- *Residents were afforded regular opportunities to review and revise proposals.* Draft planning committee recommendations were presented for community review via a series of LGRCF-sponsored public meetings.

### **The GCCB Structure**

Guidelines for selecting GCCB members are not only designed to engage recognized leaders, but also those residents who serve as less visible assets to the community.

“The key becomes why you do  
what you do...if you don’t  
want to be a part of something  
because you won’t be in  
charge of it, your heart is  
not in it.”

Julian Garnett,  
Abbott Street Neighbors

- GCCB member elections are considered to be a true test of one’s legitimacy as a community leader due to the following:
  - *A broad base of residents helped design the election process.*
  - *All local residents who are 18 or older are eligible to vote.*
  - *GCCB adheres to an open candidacy format that encourages new people to challenge long-standing leadership.*
  - *Turnout rates among eligible voters for GCCB elections have often exceeded neighborhood rates for public elections.*
- Stakeholder institutions that have been invited to join the GCCB establish their own standards for selecting representatives.
- Although a few GCCB candidates assumed a divisive stance after failing to emerge as the leaders they considered themselves to be, their criticisms were viewed as a matter of personal perception rather than community belief—especially in light of the democratic election process that was used.
- The first GCCB members to be elected underwent a two-year development phase before establishing an executive committee. In the interim, a cochair mechanism was instituted to allow for the “natural emergence” of GCCB leaders.

### III. Resident Engagement, Community Organizing, and Collaboration: Successes and Challenges

#### **Building Consensus among Stakeholders**

- Although diversity adds strength and character to communities, promoting and achieving consensus among competing community factions is a daunting challenge. For example, socioeconomic and cultural differences among Germantown residents have contributed to a long history of division and “turfism” within the neighborhood. The challenge of promoting consensus has also been complicated by the conscious decision Germantown Settlement made to develop and strengthen people of color. Many local stakeholders have had difficulty relating to issues of empowerment or have felt uncomfortable about addressing the historical disenfranchisement of minority groups. Yet the settlement continues to invite people from all different backgrounds to collaborate on community efforts and is committed to helping them understand that “as people of color develop, the neighborhood will develop, and people as a whole will benefit.”
- *Support for resident engagement is a non-negotiable condition for participation in community-building initiatives.* There have been instances when the GCCB has asked people to step away from the table because they stood opposed to genuine resident engagement. Because members understand that detractors will always exist, they choose not to devote a lot of energy to predicting or attempting to control what potential critics will do.
- *Mutual respect enables productive discussion and the resolution of differing opinions.* While GCCB members will not hesitate to let Germantown Settlement know when it has overstepped certain boundaries or if they disagree with some aspect of the work, the great degree of respect each organization has for the other allows them to work collaboratively on resolving disputes.

- *Organizing opportunities for residents to interact with each other raises the level of community togetherness.* Events such as block fellowships also bring to light the positive resources people can be to each other.

### **Developing Effective Community-Building Strategies**

- *Neighborhood assets are as important as financial resources in building a strong community initiative.* Money helps, but the wisdom, talents, and understanding of community members play a basic part in any neighborhood initiative. GCCB is simply part of the glue that binds the community process.
- *Organizations and residents should never accept the responsibility for implementing neighborhood initiatives without the needed authority.*
- *Many of the common issues neighborhood residents face can be traced to their lack of awareness regarding available resources.* Therefore, community organizers and leaders have a responsibility and an obligation to regularly share information that may not be available to others.
- *Outside funding and support must be consistent with a community's goals and aspirations.* When the Annie E. Casey Foundation originally selected Germantown Settlement's physical development work as its focus, the agency first had to determine for itself whether the Casey Foundation model actually fit the work. Only after the settlement was satisfied that the core principles of the Foundation's Rebuilding Communities Initiative were flexible enough to connect with the broad spectrum of its neighborhood efforts did the organization choose to launch the LGRCP initiative.
- *Community building is about striving to understand the unique situations and perspectives that contribute to certain conditions—not imposing preconceived ideas on other residents about how they should “act.”* Too often, planners and developers assume that people will “act better” if they have “better” places to live—only to see rehabbed properties soon become dilapidated again.



- *Thinking about a durable infrastructure to sustain the work has to be an early priority.* With multiyear projects, a lot of attention is often given to what is done up-front. However, just as much thought needs to be put into building an evolving infrastructure that can maintain an elevated level of functioning.

### Engaging Residents and Key Partners

- *Clear, compelling information is needed to inspire community participation.* There is usually at least one individual on any given block who is willing to help. The challenge is to make sure information gets out there in a way that explains community efforts in a simple, direct way.
- *Community organizing has to transcend short-term goals.* While special events help bring people together and allow them to see a neighborhood as it should be—not just the way it is—organizing demands more of community leaders than coming out with turkeys on a holiday. Local leaders have to give 100 percent every day because people will judge them for what they do, not what they say.
- *Collaborative decision-making about resource allocation can lessen competition among community organizers.* When the GCCB initially sought to identify a lead agency to disperse funds and guide its efforts in each of the five neighborhood sectors, its plan gave rise to fierce competition among community organizations. Rather than cater to “kingdom building” and local division, GCCB reversed itself by establishing collaborative sector boards and becoming its own fiduciary agency.
- *Clarity about self-interest helps diffuse conflict.* Conflicts of interest will inevitably emerge when a large number of community and agency representatives come together. To avoid any confusion or mistrust, participants should be clear up-front about *what each member needs out of a partnership* and *what others have to offer*. Agency obligations to put its interests forward and withdraw from certain decisions should also be explicitly stated.

“You have to have patience if you are going to be an organizer. You have to be prepared to let folks get things off their chests and to hear the same thing 1,000 times.”

James Igess, Director, Wister Neighborhood Council

- *Organizers need to be diligent about seeking to engage partners outside the boundaries of their traditional networks.* Although Germantown Settlement and GCCB have developed strong partnerships with several churches, they have had mixed success with connecting to a diverse range of faith institutions—especially those outside of the African-American community.

#### **Documentation and the Use of Data**

- *Conducting a community asset analysis will help expand the neighborhood consciousness beyond the need for social programs and services toward an understanding of human and social capital.*
- *Communicating a clear message of what is being undertaken and accomplished is vital to ensuring the sustainability of neighborhood efforts.* Rather than telling descriptive stories about community building, activities should be documented in a way that clearly defines objectives and outcomes. Agencies should also be mindful that residents and stakeholders might need assistance with translating complex community dynamics into concrete outcomes and accomplishments that are easily digested by outsiders.

“We helped shift the perspectives of former gang members by helping them recognize that basic day-to-day functions... whether it be turning on the lights or brushing your teeth...rely upon political processes.”

Richard Butler, President,  
Dogtown Civic Association

## **IV. Strengthening Resident Leadership Skills**

### **Leadership Development**

- *Leadership development needs to be relevant and integrated into community-building activities.* When devising an approach to resident leadership training, Germantown Settlement was guided by the premise that training had to be an integral, ongoing part of the community-building process rather than a discreet activity that takes place on the fringes. Secondly, the agency was clear about its intent to build the capacities of residents to “govern” a neighborhood initiative rather than allow people to be satisfied with “just sitting in a room when decisions get made.” The settlement also recognized training as a resource that all of the local stakeholders would benefit from, including agency staff who needed guidance around when and how to step back and support others in taking the lead on pieces of the work.

- *Care should be taken to communicate that leadership development efforts build on people’s existing strengths.* As a starting point, Germantown Settlement sponsored a six-week training institute. Many stakeholders were initially reluctant to take part—not due to a lack of commitment, but because they felt uneasy about admitting “what they didn’t know” in public. To help participants overcome their apprehensions, facilitators began the training by asking folks to share their own stories of how they became active in the community. By talking about their personal experiences and goals for the neighborhood, participants were able to tap into a common vision.
- *It is important to make a strong case for leadership development in order to attract needed resources.* Because informal neighborhood efforts and formalized organizational practices are often structured quite differently, Germantown Settlement has had to work hard to obtain support for leadership development activities. Many funders tend to assume that the agency is asking for money to prepare residents and stakeholders for activities they already know how to do.
- *The inclusion of a historical perspective into leadership trainings provides participants with valuable insight into neighborhood dynamics and the aspirations of local stakeholders.*
- *Leadership development should be structured to help residents and stakeholders feel like they are on an equal footing with service providers.* If residents and stakeholders gradually begin to ask agency staff and consultants for “answers” less frequently, leadership trainings are on the right track.

“When you’re doing so many good things... don’t publicize too much, but make sure that the people you’re helping know that you’re doing it.”

James Igees, Director,  
Wister Neighborhood Council

### **Managing Technical Assistance**

A representative from the Monarch Consulting Group—a consulting firm enlisted by Germantown Settlement and the GCCB to assist with the management of technical assistance, data collection, and marketing activities—spoke to participants about the process of engaging effective consultants. He provided the following insights:

“Don’t ever tell people on a block what to do because you’ll be responsible for what does or does not happen. Our role is to assist... asking folks how you can be of help to them in doing what they want to do.”

James Igees, Director,  
Wister Neighborhood Council

- *With respect to community building, a consultant’s true role is to help residents and stakeholders articulate and achieve their desired outcomes.*
- *Technical assistance providers must be able to grasp and be mindful of neighborhood customs, traditions, and values.* In reality, consultants usually start at a point where they assume people should be—not from where they actually are. Because people are unpredictable and change is uncomfortable, it takes a lot of understanding and patience to remain objective and nonjudgmental.
- *It is important that consultants have a broad understanding of community-building fundamentals (e.g., community organizing, resource development, real estate, data collection, and financing), but they do not need to be experts in every little aspect of the work.* In addition, organizations should incorporate an escape clause in consultant contracts just in case an individual or firm turns out not to be a good fit.
- *Technical assistance providers play an important role in organizational development because they can often help internal agency staff and their partners identify issues they may overlook because of their close proximity to the work.*

## V. Resource Development

Representatives of MSQ Associates, Inc., a financial consulting firm hired to work with the GCCB on creating a resource development strategy, offered some observations about the challenge of securing adequate funding for community initiatives. The group discussed a number of strategies and lessons learned.

- *Having broad community support for your agenda helps when negotiating with funders.* With respect to controlling one’s own destiny, it is important to understand that funders will try to dictate what you need to do and how you should go about doing it from the moment they sign on. In these instances, the ability to call upon a mobilized community to back your position becomes critical.

- *Enhancing organizational capacity to use funds wisely and document results increases the likelihood of securing financial resources.* Seeking support involves more than convincing funders that you have a great idea. Agencies also need to clearly demonstrate how progress will be achieved as a result of that idea. Thus, developing a system of checks, balances, and evaluation is key.
- *Building strong relationships with public officials at the local, state, and federal levels is essential since neighborhood organizations typically rely on public funding sources.*
- *Helping residents develop fundraising and financial management skills is critically important.* Because the skills associated with managing mini-grants are typically not common knowledge or taught in schools, resident leaders often need assistance with mastering grant writing, budgeting, and reporting practices.

“Traditionally, an expert is often thought of as someone who has the skills and experience needed to tell others what to do. Yet all hell would probably break loose if an outsider went into a community and started tinkering around without the help of someone who could bring him up to speed on neighborhood do’s and don’ts.”

Jeremiah White, Chairman,  
Monarch Consulting Group

## VI. Youth Leadership and Involvement

Young residents also play an integral part in Germantown Settlement’s community-building efforts. Five young people (one from each neighborhood sector) who serve as representatives of their peers in the community sit as equal voting members on the GCCB. In addition, a plan developed under the LGRCP calls for the creation of a comprehensive Germantown Youth Collaborative that will bring young people together to formulate youth-directed education, recreation, and leadership activities. Issues discussed and lessons learned in this area include:

- *The addition of staff who are knowledgeable about the unique experiences of youth can help agencies engage younger residents more effectively.* When attempting to tap into the talents and interests of youth, Germantown Settlement staff first had to overcome the obstacle of not speaking the same language as young people. To address this challenge, the agency hired a youth coordinator and established several other positions that were specifically focused on adolescent, teen, and young-adult issues.

“If you give kids a chance, they will say something; they will help you. Adults need to involve young people because we are the future. We are the ones who will be taking care of you and managing the money in the bank down the line.”

Angela Taylor,  
Youth Representative, GCCB

- *Young people can be creative, “out of the box” thinkers.* Because youth are not burdened with the same historical baggage that adults must contend with, they are able to bring bright ideas and a lot of energy to the planning table. By asking kids what they think is needed, the GCCB has been able to tap into new and valuable perspectives.
- *Involvement in community-building initiatives provides young people with real world skills and experiences.* For many youth who are seeking to explore new arenas, community-oriented work offers an opportunity to learn a great deal about the “real world” and their own potential as agents of change.
- *Youth organizers have proven to be an effective link to other young people in the community.* When attempting to engage youth, it is important to reach out to them in places where they hang out and talk to them about what they want to do. Toward this aim, the majority of the settlement’s youth outreach is conducted in collaboration with youth advisors.
- *Young people often emerge as committed, long-term supporters of community initiatives.* Fun neighborhood activities such as the Fernhill Fall Festival create “little islands of memory” for young children who often come back as teens to serve as volunteers for local events.

## LESSONS LEARNED AND NEXT STEPS

### Mattapan Community Partnership

Members of the Mattapan Community Partnership (MCP) team found the peer match to be very educational and helpful in furthering their own efforts. Owing to the effective resident leadership strategies demonstrated by Germantown Settlement and the GCCB, MCP participants acquired valuable new information and tools that will assist them in building their own capacities around inclusive community building.

Since the peer match meeting, MCP has accomplished the following:

- The partnership made significant strides toward completing a strategic plan.
- MCP produced and distributed its first newsletter to Mattapan residents, local agencies, and community stakeholders. Plans are also in the works to develop a website that will provide links to helpful community information and services.
- Spurred by Germantown’s success with engaging youth in its revitalization efforts, MCP has stepped up its own efforts to involve young people by significantly expanding outreach activities. Additionally, the partnership recently secured some initial funding to support the creation of a neighborhood Youth Council, which will help guide peer leadership development, launch a youth-oriented community newsletter, and establish a Junior Community Ambassadors Program.

“If we don’t deposit what’s  
in us to somebody coming  
behind us, it dies.”

Julian Garnett,  
200 W. Abbott Street Neighbors

The peer match helped MCP identify the following priorities for its future work:

- Developing a three- to five-year fundraising plan to ensure the sustainability of various MCP projects.
- Refining plans for its Community Ambassadors Program in accordance with the issues and challenges identified by resident and community partners.
- Engaging Mattapan residents in leadership development and policy efforts. For example, the Community Ambassadors Program (CAP) includes a component designed to promote voter registration, education, and awareness. Under CAP, local workshops and forums will be held to assist community members in becoming informed and empowered voters who are knowledgeable about the rights they are afforded as participants in a democratic process.
- Identifying opportunities to promote community economic development through the inclusion of residents in the creation of employment and training initiatives.
- Promoting affordable housing and local business development within the Mattapan commercial district.

## WHAT IS *MAKING CONNECTIONS*?

*Making Connections* is the Annie E. Casey Foundation’s initiative to improve outcomes for some of the nation’s most vulnerable children and families. The initiative is conducted through deep and durable partnerships with selected cities and neighborhoods across the United States—currently 22 cities that make up the broad *Making Connections* network. Several core ideas underlie *Making Connections*:

- *Making Connections* is based on the recognition that the greatest number of American children who suffer from “rotten outcomes” live in city neighborhoods that are in many ways cut off—disconnected—from the mainstream opportunities of American life. Thus, *Making Connections* is “place-based”—it focuses on specific neighborhoods in specific cities.
- *Making Connections* has a simple theory: that children do better when they grow up in strong families, and families do better when they live in supportive neighborhoods. Thus, *Making Connections* strategies are aimed at helping families obtain what they need to be strong, and helping neighborhoods gain the resources they need in order to support families well.
- *Making Connections* focuses on three major types of “connections” that help families grow stronger and achieve what they want for their children. The first of these is helping families connect to **economic opportunities** and to jobs that provide income, assets, and an economic future. Research and experience suggest that this type of connection is unlikely without two others: strong connections to the **social networks** of kin, neighborhood groups, and other informal ties that sustain families when times get tough, and to high-quality, **effective services and supports** that help families reach their goals.

*Making Connections* focuses on improving results for children and families in tough neighborhoods. Core results that *Making Connections* communities are mobilizing around include:



- Families have increased earnings and income;
- Families have increased levels of assets;
- Families, youth, and neighborhoods increase their participation in civic life;
- Families and neighborhoods have strong informal supports and networks;
- Families have access to quality services and supports; and
- Children are healthy and ready to succeed in school.

A key task in ensuring the success of *Making Connections* is making available the learning and technical assistance that the participating sites need to move forward with their work. One of the ways that the Foundation provides this kind of support is by making peer matches available.

## WHAT ARE PEER MATCHES?

Since 1995, as part of a broader effort to rely more intentionally on the experience of people working in the field, the Center for the Study of Social Policy began working with several partners and funders to develop and offer a rather intensive form of peer technical assistance known as peer matches. Peer matches are structured opportunities for teams of people from two or more jurisdictions who are working on a similar issue to exchange experiences and practical knowledge toward resolving a particular challenge that has been identified in advance.

The rationale behind peer matches is straightforward. Often, the people best able to provide hands-on help are the “doers” themselves—people from states and communities who have successfully addressed a problem or created an effective new policy or strategy. These are the people who have an acute sense of what has and hasn’t worked, and why and why not. They have developed good tools and strategies they can share. And they are usually eager to help others because of a strong sense of shared mission. But while good peer matches are informal, they are never

casual, using a carefully designed process and structure to focus the common interests, roles, and goodwill that exist between peers on producing meaningful change for a community.

Peer matches are a resource and time intensive strategy. Careful consideration of when, where, and how to use this approach is therefore always warranted. Experience has shown that careful preparation and execution of the matches are critical factors for their success. This approach tends to work best when the following conditions are in place:

- A specific problem or issue has been identified, and the people looking for help are at a key decision point with respect to the design or implementation of a state or community strategy;
- Stakeholders are invested in and have a high degree of ownership in solving a problem;
- The timing is right—e.g., a decision or action that will affect the community’s family strengthening agenda is going to be taken and/or someone needs to be convinced to take action; and
- A reasonably small number of people have the authority and ability to act on what they learn in the match.

To date, the Center has brokered over 60 peer matches on topics ranging from creating resident-led community development corporations and governance structures, to establishing multilingual homeownership assistance centers, to building integrated services models. As illustrated in the case summaries that are part of this series, peer matches help spread good policies and practice, build relationships among different stakeholders who may not always have a chance to work together, and enable people to put changes in place that improve results for children, families, and neighborhoods.





**The Annie E. Casey Foundation**

701 St. Paul Street  
Baltimore, MD 21202  
410.547.6600  
410.547.6624 fax  
[www.aecf.org](http://www.aecf.org)

Center  
for the  
Study  
of  
Social  
Policy

1575 Eye Street, N.W., Suite 500  
Washington, DC 20005  
202.371.1565  
202.371.1472 fax  
[www.cssp.org](http://www.cssp.org)