



The State of the American Community Change Field:

Where we've been and where we need to go

by
Anne C. Kubisch
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The Aspen Roundtable: Voices from the Field III

- Combination of program documents, evaluations, and interviews/focus groups
- Refers to 44 community change efforts over 20 years with:
 - \$1 billion in philanthropic investment over the last two decades
 - More than \$10 billion in public sector investment



Place-Based Efforts Are Here for the Foreseeable Future

The landscape of actors has changed:

- Federal Government
- Other actors with long term commitment to place:
 - Family, community and newer foundations
 - Anchor institutions
 - Financial institutions: banks, CDFIs
 - Local government initiatives
 - Developers with a community orientation



This summary:

1. Four kinds of outcomes can be seen:
 - Human development
 - Physical and economic development
 - Community building and capacity
 - Policy and system change
2. Four themes underlying success
3. Four big challenges for the future

Outcome 1:

Human Development

- Put into place “best practices” in child development, health, employment, etc.
- Outcomes seen for the individuals who received the services, but not population-level



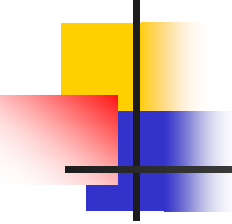
Outcome 2: Physical and Economic Development

- Physical revitalization is a powerful anchor for community-level action:
 - Reduced crime, increased property values
 - Increased “housing-plus”
- Good track record on commercial development but not economic revitalization



Outcome 3: Community Building and Capacity

- New leadership emerged
- New social capital and connections made across community residents
- Many organizations' capacities were built
- Community "civic" capacity increased: organized, good plans, stronger voice city-wide



Outcome 4: Policy and Systems Change

- Legitimization of place-based work: many attracted and leveraged new funding
- Parallel policy and advocacy track to support community agendas
 - Partnerships between communities and powerful allies triggered system responsiveness

Lesson 1:

Good theories of change

- Clarity about goals, definition of success and theory of change
 - Realistic assumptions about outcomes, proportionality, time frame
- But not rigidly over-specified and imposed from the outside

Lesson 2:

Good implementation

- Intentionality: programmatic and community building
- Applying the guiding principles
 - Comprehensiveness is a principle not a goal
 - Community building is BOTH a principle and a set of actions

Lesson 3:

Good alignment

- Internal alignment of mission, management and activities
- External alignment of partners
- Accountability mechanisms

Lesson 4:

Good learning and feedback

- Effective internal feedback and learning mechanisms: revisiting the theory of change and adapting as the work unfolds
 - Improvements in local area data have helped inclusive planning and accountability



Big Challenge 1: The power of “place”

- Power is at the metro or regional level
 - What to do about weak market economies?
- High mobility
- Gentrification
 - How to do development without displacement?
 - Is mixed-income and mixed-race possible?



Big Challenge 2:

Collaboration, integration, synergy

- Key to population-level change
- Silos aren't bust-able
- Brokering and alignment is key across
 - Domains (social, physical, economic)
 - Sectors (public, private, nonprofit)
 - Levels (community, city, region, beyond)

...but requires capacity and funding...



Big Challenge 3: Field level learning

- Structure cross-site learning around critical questions about, for example:
 - How to achieve dose and scale in different contexts
 - What works in weak markets
 - How community building leads to resilient communities and “hard” outcomes



Big Challenge 4: Structural inequity

- Major structural inequities still undermine good community level work
- How to maximize the community-system change link
- Racial segregation is increasing: how to tackle the race/place/poverty knot?



Conclusion:

Beyond “initiatives”

Community change is really about:

- Democratic institution-building
- Developing strong, well-anchored and legitimate community platforms for technical and financial support

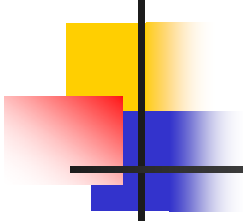


How to do it?

Embrace complexity without being overwhelmed

The three keys:

- Internal alignment: mission, governance, management, programs, accountability
- External alignment and brokering: partners within and outside the community
- Learning, assessing and adapting along the way



Thank you