

NURTURING

Community Leadership

Health grantmakers are increasingly looking to build healthier, more effective communities through leadership development. Community leaders and activists can help bring about positive change in health outcomes. But knowing that many don't have the training, tools, and support they need to be most effective in their jobs, funders are learning how best to use foundation resources to help nurture and build community leadership. In reflecting on what had been learned from supporting the Family Community Leadership Program since 1981 in Oregon, the W.K. Kellogg Foundation stated, "Community leadership is most effective at the grassroots level, with broad demographic involvement. Individuals are looking for ways to be engaged in the community, to learn, to contribute, to connect... [They] become gifts to the community as the leadership development changes their lives, while enriching the communities they serve. Individuals become confident in their abilities – and they go out and change things" (Kellogg 2005).

For many of the health funders that have incorporated capacity building as a grantmaking strategy, this work has brought insights into the precarious state of leadership in grantee organizations. All too often, a nonprofit's strength and effectiveness is shaped by and dependent upon its leader – an individual who may be experiencing burnout, preparing to transition to a different career, or approaching retirement. A 2004 survey of more than 2,200 nonprofit organizations sponsored by The Annie E. Casey Foundation found that 65 percent of organizations expected to go through a leadership transition by 2009, while just 57 percent had experienced a transition during the past 10 years. Fifty-five percent of current executive directors surveyed were 50 years old or older. And in the many communities where there is a great need for services and care, there is often a shortage of talented and committed young professionals who might be drawn to the challenges of the nonprofit sector (AECF 2004). In 2004, the Forbes Fund in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania commissioned a research project to explore the recruitment and retention of young professionals to the nonprofit sector. The study found that while many recent college graduates are initially attracted to careers in the nonprofit sector, noncompetitive salaries often present a barrier to retaining the best and brightest (Cryer 2004).

OPPORTUNITIES FOR GRANTMAKERS

As grantmakers gain a better understanding of the linkages between leadership and meeting mission, many have made

TIPS FOR NURTURING COMMUNITY LEADERSHIP*Encourage Individual Leadership Development*

- Support varied styles of training such as formal training, peer-to-peer networking, and coaching in the context of the individual's particular circumstances.
- Conduct human capacity building in conjunction with organizational capacity building efforts.
- Look for opportunities to build skills among second-tier management or entry-level employees.

Find Opportunities in Transition

- Make it viable for executive directors to imagine and pursue a transition.
- Take time to clarify how the transition can benefit the organization.
- Help the organization assess its health, needs, and resources and sharpen its mission, vision, and goals.

Identify and Support Emerging Leaders

- Value new ideas.
- Revisit organizational structures and expectations that may need to be updated to retain younger staff and provide opportunities for new leadership.
- Promote a healthier balance between work and personal/family life.

strengthening and sustaining leaders of community-based programs a funding priority.

- **Supporting Leadership Development** – With funding from The UPS Foundation, the Walter & Elise Haas Fund, and the Missouri Foundation for Health (MFFH), CompassPoint Nonprofit Services has launched *The Leadership Development Program for Women Executives in Underserved Communities* in the San Francisco Bay area and rural Missouri. In Missouri, the year-long pilot program will provide management and leadership skills development for 12 women executives who are leading nonprofit health organizations and are current MFFH grantees. Program activities will include a one-day forum for executive directors to meet and network with other women executives and community

and political leaders to discuss the challenges and effective strategies related to being a woman executive director. Participants will then attend quarterly, one-day workshops that will provide skills-building opportunities and foster a learning community as well as seven executive leadership circle sessions. The women will also receive an award of up to \$1,500 in professional development funds to pursue additional leadership or professional development activities and be recognized at a closing celebration.

- ▶ **Preparing for Leadership Transitions in Community Organizations** – The United Methodist Health Ministry Fund, in conjunction with TransitionGuides, has been focusing on the issue of leadership transitions both within the fund and among grantee organizations. TransitionGuides, an Annie E. Casey Foundation grantee, is a collaboration of consultants with extensive track records in working with nonprofit organizations and leadership transitions. Tom Adams, president of TransitionGuides states, “Properly managed, a leadership transition provides a pivotal moment, enabling an organization to change direction, maintain momentum, and strengthen its capacity” (AECF 2004). In July and November 2005, the United Methodist Health Ministry Fund sponsored workshops for long-term executives and board chairs from grantee organizations and other social service providers in Kansas. The goal of the workshops was to provide nonprofits with resources and opportunities to discuss and develop strategies for emergency and planned leadership transitions. Kim Moore, president of the fund, reflected, “We need healthy, well-led organizations to do our job. We fund some great organizations with executive directors with outstanding track records. Our board saw this program – the workshops, the follow-on executive coaching for participants, and building our succession and transition management consulting capacity – as an important and wise investment for our community” (TransitionLeader 2005).
- ▶ **Addressing Leadership Issues such as Turnover, Low Salaries, and Burnout in Nonprofits** – Health grantmakers across the country are utilizing special recognition and awards programs to identify and acknowledge tireless leaders and unsung heroes. These programs are often an important complement to established grantmaking strategies in that the programs highlight individuals, affirm their commitment, encourage them to continue their work, and raise the leaders up as role models for others engaged in the issues. In reflecting on its grant with the W. K. Kellogg Foundation, the Academy for Educational Development stated, “Leaders do not always know they are leaders; they may view themselves as someone who works hard when given a job to do. Recognition of leadership builds confidence and challenges them to do more. Awards for effective leadership can bolster confidence and courage in a leader who must continue the work in the face of enormous despair” (Kellogg 2005). One of the The California Wellness Foundation’s (TCWF) four grantmaking goals is to recognize and encourage leaders who are working to improve health and wellness in their communities. The founda-

tion has four different leadership awards, including the *TCWF California Peace Prize* which honors individuals whose outstanding efforts have helped prevent violent deaths and injuries in communities across California. Many of the leaders recognized by this award have worked countless hours to prevent violence in their communities. Each honoree receives a cash award of \$25,000 and the foundation dedicates a portion of nongrantmaking resources to publicizing the work of the honorees. For the foundation, the overall objective of the *Peace Prize* program is twofold: to reinforce the message that violence is a preventable public health problem and to call attention to the accomplishments of the honorees (TCWF 2005).

- ▶ **Engaging Emerging Leaders** – In order to advance important social issues and sustain and build community organizations, grantmakers are identifying and nurturing more leaders of color and encouraging younger leaders. The Sierra Health Foundation is partnering with the Sacramento Region Community Foundation to increase opportunities for young people in the region to develop leadership and other skills. The foundations’ youth engagement strategy is designed to engage youth through two distinct but related opportunities – a grant advisory board and youth-led grant projects. Members of the grant advisory board are selected through a competitive process by the community foundation and serve a one-year term. The youth members receive training on philanthropy, needs assessments, meeting facilitation, and group decisionmaking skills. During their term, they review youth-led project applications and make funding recommendations. Grants of \$2,500 are available for youth-led projects which must have significant youth involvement in all stages, including planning the project, completing the grant application, and implementing the project. The Sierra Health Foundation anticipates that youth involved in these activities will experience a higher level of confidence, develop a greater sense of their value to their communities, establish a valuable relationship with a caring adult, and learn to work collaboratively.

This article is part of GIH’s portfolio, From the Ground Up: Improving Community Health, Inspiring Community Action. Each article focuses on an approach grantmakers are using to improve health in communities. The entire portfolio is available at the GIH Web site, www.gih.org.

SOURCES

- The Annie E. Casey Foundation, *Casey Connects*, Fall 2004.
- Cryer, Shelly, *Recruiting and Retaining The Next Generation of Nonprofit Sector Leadership* (New York, NY: The Initiative for Nonprofit Sector Careers, 2004).
- W. K. Kellogg Foundation, *Featured Projects – Insights*, <<http://75.wkcf.org/ProjectInsights.aspx?ProjectID=5>> accessed November 5, 2005.
- The California Wellness Foundation, *Reflections On Leadership – The California Peace Prize* (Woodland Hills, CA: 2005).
- “United Methodist Health Ministry Fund Pioneers Succession Planning Workshop for Grantees,” *TransitionLeader* (2)4, Fall 2005.