



Fostering Resident Voice and Influence

The Making Connections Experience with Resident Engagement and Leadership

By Scott Hebert and Juanita Gallion

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Message from

THE AECF VICE PRESIDENT, CENTER FOR COMMUNITY AND ECONOMIC OPPORTUNITY

Citizen participation has been a core value and aspiration of the community-building field since the 1960s. It expresses the democratic belief that citizens and consumers have not only the right, but *special knowledge* that can produce better programs and policies—especially for communities of color and other marginalized communities. Organized citizens have come together and acted on their own behalf to change bad policies that impact their lives, their children’s education and their community’s well-being. Yet, there remains a lack of clarity about citizen or resident engagement—what it is, what it contributes, how to finance it and what has been learned about meaningful rather than symbolic engagement.

Making Connections was a 10-year community-building initiative of the Annie E. Casey Foundation, started in the late 1990s and extending a few years beyond 2010. Its purpose was to strengthen families in low-income neighborhoods across the United States, the end goal being to create better outcomes for children. A primary strategy of Making Connections was to support the voices and leadership of families across culture, class and language. This diversity of participant voice helped shape the initiative’s design, operations and investments in those neighborhoods. The transformational power of engaging residents, youth and parents was a long-held belief and practice of the Casey Foundation. These constituents had the knowledge, experience, insights and aspirations to lead in their own families, in their neighborhoods and in broader policy arenas.

Evaluative reports and reflections about Making Connections in the past few years all identified resident engagement and leadership as perhaps the key contribution of the overall effort. As Foundation staff spoke about these findings at conferences and in webinars, colleagues in the field were most interested in how Casey went about supporting resident and citizen leadership. They asked on repeated occasions: How did you start resident engagement? What were the key ingredients? Did it make a difference? How did you sustain support for it during and after the initiative?

Fostering Resident Voice and Influence in Community Change is an attempt to share in more detail Casey’s experience about resident engagement in Making Connections, what was tried, how communities differed and what lessons were learned. It reports on resident engagement from start-up to phase down and addresses strategies for seeding initial conversations, results-based leadership training and sustaining resident engagement strategies. The report captures not only engagement but examples of co-design and joint ownership of results and investments. The report shares lessons learned, as well as mistakes and the challenges for partnerships in the context of time-limited national initiatives.

Among the other lessons presented in this report, the Casey Foundation’s role in the Making Connections resident engagement experience highlighted some key “investor lessons” that are particularly important for funders to consider:

- In addition to a national funder’s contribution, *it is crucial to have co-investment in resident engagement from local funders early on and throughout the life of an initiative* like Making Connections as a way of building local commitment to support such activities on a long-term basis. Such co-investment will depend on the national and local funders acting as collaborative partners, developing a shared vision for the initiative and seeing resident engagement, leadership and voice as core elements of any community initiative.
- *Know that roles can be complicated with this work.* With Making Connections, the Casey Foundation acted as both a funder and an implementer of the initiative. Although there was value in each role, these roles are distinct. Combining them led to ambiguity and complications in the Foundation’s relationships with the residents and local partners in the sites—for example, in determining when to be directive as a funder versus collaborative and responsive as an implementing partner.
- Although the overall intent of Making Connections was always to have “families at the center of the work,” *the initiative was not explicitly co-designed with residents and families.* In retrospect, this proved to be very problematic because at the beginning

of the initiative local residents had expectations for more ownership and ability to direct the focus of the local work than the Foundation had anticipated. This created tensions, and the dynamics played out in different ways across sites over time. Some sites successfully incorporated residents in more meaningful leadership roles, while at others, residents struggled to secure “a seat at the table” with the local nonprofit and public sector partners.

- Many of the impactful resident engagement activities during the early years of Making Connections were not continued or continued as consistently as they could have been throughout the initiative’s duration. For various reasons (including changes in local initiative management), some sites moved away from the ongoing resident relationship-building and engagement efforts that were simply focused on connecting residents to each other and the initiative’s work. In hindsight, this was a real loss, as the Making Connections *sites could have reached a greater number of residents to increase their participation, leadership and voice*, and they could have continued to build strong, lasting connections between new residents and new partners for the long-term.
- At the outset, Casey staff did not widely share a *common understanding of resident engagement* nor did we have an operating framework that considered the various types of engagement. In later years, a framework was developed that addressed part, but not all, of the components. One lesson learned is that there is a range of engagement from showing up and participating to owning the design of programs and policies and taking on critical leadership roles in the community.

This report offers a rich portrait of resident engagement and a sample of the tools developed across Making Connections communities. The authors of this report were themselves deeply involved in Making Connections, and resident leaders and their community colleagues shaped the report’s findings. In addition, Casey’s long-standing investment in Making Connections has involved a strong partnership with the Center for the Study of Social Policy (CSSP) right from the outset. It is only fitting that Casey and CSSP collaborated to produce this report on resident engagement.

Resident engagement remains a key dimension of Casey’s community change work in its hometowns of Baltimore and Atlanta. Casey is also devoting increased attention and investment in constituent engagement and commitment to race equity and inclusion across its entire portfolio. Supporting parent leadership is a core principle of our evolving two-generation strategies that work simultaneously with parents, caregivers and their children. For Casey, two-generation strategies have their roots in Making Connections, and our recent expansion of investments in improving outcomes for youth and young adults has youth leadership as a prominent feature. Young people are critical for understanding youth aspirations and the barriers they face as they transition to adulthood. And youth are essential for advocating policy and program changes. The Foundation believes that residents, parents and youth are invaluable partners in achieving its mission to improve the outcomes for disadvantaged children and families and will continue to invest in partnerships with them.

There is no better time than now for grappling with the meaning and practice of citizen participation in our social, civic and political lives. The challenges of today call out for sustained leadership at all levels. Grassroots leadership grows from the experience and

“ *Colleagues in the field...asked on repeated occasions: How did you start resident engagement? What were the key ingredients? Did it make a difference? How did you sustain support for it during and after the initiative?* ”

aspirations of real people in real communities. We in philanthropy and the social sector can and must invest in this leadership as we do our work. The dividends will be enormously important for our shared future.

I want to thank the authors, CSSP and all the Making Connections residents and partners who have contributed to this report and our journey together in Making Connections to improve outcomes for kids, families and communities.



Bob Giloth
The Annie E. Casey Foundation

Making Connections was the Annie E. Casey Foundation’s 10-year initiative to improve results for children and families in some of the most distressed communities, carried out in partnership with a number of communities nationwide from 2000–2010, with local activities extending for several years beyond that point. All of us involved in the initiative owe thanks to the Annie E. Casey Foundation for its vision and for the imagination of its leadership and board to invest in work that was both innovative and ambitious.

Making Connections was unusual in several ways. It was one of the first multicity initiatives to focus strongly on a clear set of child and family outcomes, defined as changes in conditions of well-being for the children and families living in those communities. *Making Connections* focused on improving the economic well-being of families while simultaneously providing the best possible start for young children from the earliest years through 3rd grade. The initiative was also unusual in its emphasis on the use of data and continuous learning: local learning partnerships provided real-time information to guide local efforts. And, from early on, *Making Connections* put families at the center of the work” and sought to have residents play strong roles in their community’s efforts to achieve results.

This report shares lessons learned through *Making Connections*’ efforts to lift up **resident voice** and **leadership**. It captures the values that undergirded the work, the variety and complexity of the ways in which residents were involved in and led the work, the shift in the nature and intent of resident-led activities over time as local efforts evolved and the challenges of sustaining resident leadership as a priority after the Casey Foundation’s funding and technical assistance ended.

The report was developed with strong guidance from and review by local leaders who were residents in the *Making Connections* neighborhoods. As a result, we hope that the report captures some of what they experienced and viewed as most important.

Looking back at *Making Connections* through the lens of resident voice and leadership is simultaneously inspiring and sobering. The inspiration comes from the many examples of imaginative, persistent and successful resident leadership that occurred during the initiative and that continue today. The resident leaders whose thoughts you’ll see reflected in this report are just a few of the hundreds of parents and other residents who helped to improve economic opportunities for families in their neighborhoods, and early childhood experiences for their children, over the initiative’s span. They are among dozens of residents who moved on to other civic leadership roles, becoming the heads of local nonprofits, moving into staff roles in community work and serving on local boards and commissions.

This review is sobering, however, in that it reveals how much is yet to be accomplished in terms of sustaining attention to and investment in resident leadership, voice and power in any given community. Although some local leaders observe that *Making*

“ Looking back at *Making Connections* through the lens of resident voice and leadership is simultaneously inspiring and sobering.

Connections permanently changed the awareness of resident leadership in their communities, few claim that it resulted in a local culture that continuously invests in, supports and sustains it.

We hope that the lessons from this report are useful to people now carrying out similar work. I’d highlight several observations:

- Many types of resident-led activities are described in the report, but **the power of resident voice and leadership emerges when a local jurisdiction combines, sequences and sustains multiple activities, customizing them to resident interests and priorities**. The most successful local efforts came when there was a sustained value accorded to resident role and voice, and the many different activities—from community meetings to network organizing to participatory research to community organizing—were a continuous and evolving expression of the importance of that value.

Message from

THE DIRECTOR OF THE CENTER FOR THE STUDY OF SOCIAL POLICY

- *Effective resident leadership and voice requires at least one—and ideally many—local organizations that see it as their “job” to make this happen.* In *Making Connections*, the most sustained resident leadership occurred in neighborhoods and communities where a local organization was a visible leader for these activities. The White Center Community Development Association, for example, served that role for its community immediately south of Seattle. The Network Center for Community Change in Louisville, Kentucky, was able to sustain this work for five years after *Making Connections* ended. Yet the *Making Connections* experience also suggests that one organization, alone, cannot sustain this work. That requires a deeper-seated and longer-term commitment from local funders and, ideally, local government, to invest in the development of leaders and to ensure that there are real and consistent opportunities for leadership to be exercised.
- *If resident voice is to have power, funders and agencies must change their own behavior and perspectives.* The *Making Connections* experience showed that it is not just residents who can benefit from acquiring new skills and interacting in new ways. If funders, service providers and other community institutions are serious about resident leadership, those entities also need to learn how to operate in a different manner by committing to supporting resident leadership for the long haul, by recognizing resident-led activities as a core component of every community initiative, by compensating residents for their time commitment and by developing a coherent and unified co-investment strategy among funders for supporting those activities. It is also crucial for funders, services providers and civic institutions to act in a transparent, non-defensive manner and to seek and welcome “pushback” from residents. Ultimately, what is sought by prioritizing resident leadership is a shift in influence and power, and unless that is recognized and honored, the encouragement of resident voice may be superficial and result in resident frustration when nothing really changes.

Looking to the future, what are the most promising directions for raising up resident power and voice as part of community change efforts? The field has continued to evolve since *Making Connections*, and there are several directions that were touched on by Casey’s initiative but are now getting fuller expression in present-day efforts. *First*, communities can give *more explicit attention to building and shifting power*, recognizing that this requires investment not only in individual leadership but in the organizational infrastructure and capacity to support residents in efforts to change systems, challenge policies and practices that do not benefit their communities and advocate for those that do. *Second*, several current place-based efforts are investing specifically in *youth organizing*, recognizing that this requires its own methods and has its own substantial benefits. And *third*, local and statewide leaders are recognizing *the importance and power of narrative change as a component of effective resident voice, leadership and power*. Narrative change makes explicit that changing people’s “hearts and minds” as part of community and systems transformation requires that people adopt a fundamentally different view of the inherent potential of residents in under-invested and under-resourced neighborhoods. This requires uniting resident voice and leadership with a sophistication about communications that has too often been lacking in “resident engagement” activities of the past.

Finally, reviewing the *Making Connections* experience reminds all of us who were involved in it of what a rare opportunity and privilege it was to join together with communities and many cities around the country on behalf of achieving better outcomes for children and families. The partnerships and friendships formed in the course of the initiative have persisted, and the work goes on and becomes stronger as it evolves. We have all grown and learned from the experience and have lessons that will make this work even stronger in the future.



Frank Farrow
Center for the Study of Social Policy

Background & Purpose of This Report



THIS REPORT AND ITS ANALYSIS MAKE AN IMPORTANT DISTINCTION ABOUT WHAT CONSTITUTES MEANINGFUL RESIDENT ENGAGEMENT AND LEADERSHIP.

Introduction

Resident engagement is often noted as a key element in neighborhood transformation and community change efforts, yet very little literature exists that explains and captures how resident engagement actually happens and what it takes to achieve lasting resident engagement capacity and success. As one step toward expanding the information available, this report presents insights gained by the Annie E. Casey Foundation after more than a decade of working with residents to achieve better results during the **Making Connections** initiative, Casey's signature community change effort of the 2000s. The report describes the various activities in which residents were engaged during Making Connections, the sequence and timing of those activities and some of the impact and community improvements that were achieved as a result. Through a focus on the Making Connections experience, the report highlights effective resident engagement strategies and assesses the factors that can inhibit or enhance their effectiveness.

Making Connections was a decade-long effort that sought to improve life outcomes for children in some of the most challenged neighborhoods in the United States by strengthening

families and transforming communities and social institutions so that they could better support families. The communities that were part of the Making Connections initiative were focused on improving families' economic success, assuring a good start in life for young children and developing stronger social networks and support services. A key component of the initiative was its emphasis on residents. Residents were essential partners who had a strong voice and held multiple leadership roles. Local communities sought to partner directly with the families whose lives were being impacted by conditions in their neighborhoods. They also worked to promote residents' roles as decision-makers and leaders. Casey invested significantly in resident and community engagement and resident leadership activities throughout Making Connections. This long-term investment has led to measurable changes and lasting influence within the local Making Connections sites and offers lessons for the larger community change field. We offer these lessons to funders, practitioners, policymakers, resident leaders, nonprofits and those interested in improving resident and community engagement for collective impact, neighborhood revitalization and other comprehensive change efforts.



Purpose of This Report

In 2013 and 2014, Casey released two reports that identified a variety of community change lessons learned from Making Connections,¹ as well as insights about the community capacities necessary to pursue and sustain such change over time.² The reports also generated interest from practitioners and funders for more focused insights on the resident engagement efforts during the initiative. There was a strong desire from the community change field for additional guidance on how to promote resident engagement, including direction on the strategies that are most effective. In addition the field wanted to know more about the outcomes that can be expected for individuals, communities, organizations and funders from such activities.

Accordingly, in this report, we attempt to address such key questions as:

- ◆ How can we do resident engagement work well?
- ◆ How will we know the resident engagement and leadership activities we've instituted have made a difference?
- ◆ What advice can be shared so others don't have to start from ground zero in building resident engagement capacity?

To answer these questions, we examine both the commonalities and the variations of resident engagement experiences and strategies across the Making Connections cities. (See page 15 for a list of Making Connections sites.) Although the insights presented here are primarily derived from the Making Connections experience, they are applicable to other initiatives seeking a better understanding of how to engage residents in community revitalization efforts and sustain that engagement over time. This report and its analysis make an important distinction about what constitutes meaningful resident engagement and leadership. Our hope is that this report can be used to encourage the community change field to embrace a definition of resident engagement that meets this higher standard.

The information in this report comes from a variety of sources. In addition to reviewing previously completed reports and assessments of the Making Connections experience, we interviewed key Foundation staff, as well as staff of the Center for the Study of Social Policy, technical assistance providers and trainers, local site staff and civic leaders, and most importantly, a cadre of resident leaders.

The resident leaders who graciously shared their expertise and insights on the Making Connections experience (and on what has transpired in their communities since the end of the initiative) offer a wealth of knowledge that could potentially have a profound impact on our understanding of authentic resident engagement and its contribution to better outcomes. The resident leaders interviewed for this report contributed greatly to a more nuanced description of the dynamics and challenges of resident engagement during Making Connections and were the source of many of the report's recommendations. The prominence of resident leaders' voices and recommendations in this report represents a departure from other publications on this topic that tend to be written largely (if not exclusively) from a funder or provider perspective.

We hope the experiences of resident leaders and their recommendations serve as valuable guidance for the community change field, especially during this time of continued investment by federal agencies and national, state, regional and local foundations in neighborhood revitalization, community development, creating healthy communities and other forms of community-based work.

The Casey Foundation - Center for the Study of Social Policy **PARTNERSHIP AND TECHNICAL ASSISTANCE** **IN MAKING CONNECTIONS**

The Annie E. Casey Foundation recognized the important role of technical assistance in promoting learning and the dissemination of information on best practices across the Making Connections sites. Casey selected the Center for the Study of Social Policy (CSSP) as a key partner in making technical assistance available to sites. CSSP led the technical assistance design and delivery effort for the initiative through the Technical Assistance Resource Center.

CSSP managed more than \$1.5 million in annual technical assistance resources, a significant portion of which was dedicated to sites' efforts to engage and train resident leaders. The technical assistance dollars supported peer-to-peer matches between different cities, training for financial coaches, results-based facilitation and Results-Based Accountability™ training, strategies for addressing racial inequity and other skill-building activities. In addition, in partnership with Casey, CSSP completed a number of studies, interviews and reports documenting the impact of the technical assistance and resident engagement and leadership activities.



Learn more about Making Connections at <http://bit.ly/CSSP-making-connections>.



WHEN BARRIERS ARE OVERCOME

successful

RESIDENT ENGAGEMENT AND LEADERSHIP

works

TO ADVANCE COMMUNITY CHANGE.



The “What” and “Why” OF RESIDENT ENGAGEMENT AND LEADERSHIP IN MAKING CONNECTIONS

What is Resident Engagement?

Resident engagement is a term that is widely used. However, different initiatives and programs interpret in varying ways what sort of activities constitute resident engagement and use different standards to measure the success of their efforts.

For Making Connections, the term **resident** was clearly defined as those who live, work, worship and play in the community (or neighborhood) with which the initiative was engaged. The term “resident” encompassed individuals, parents, families, youth and children in some of the most challenged neighborhoods in the United States.³

This orientation helped define the standards for the **engagement** of residents in the Making Connections sites. Engagement meant residents being involved in the decisions that impacted their lives by way of shared knowledge, power, voice and opportunity. It also meant residents would be partners with funders, community-based organizations, local government—and with each other. Over time, engagement increasingly also meant leadership, with residents taking on roles and responsibilities to help direct the work.

Accordingly, the Making Connections resident engagement activities were designed to ensure real influence for residents, and they were intended to contribute to achieving results. Engagement activities encouraged real partnerships and they were designed to be responsive to the individual needs of communities.

IN MAKING CONNECTIONS, **resident**

engagement meant residents being involved in the decisions that impacted their lives and their communities and working as partners with funders, community-based organizations, local government and with each other.

- ◆ **Residents have a seat at the table and exercise real influence.** Going beyond residents simply being invited to meetings in which they have a constrained role, the Making Connections engagement activities sought to give residents the capacity and opportunity to ensure that their voices were heard, and that they could use their influence with decision-making bodies to change their communities for the better. In this way, residents could attain and exercise real power in the decisions that impact their own and their families’ lives. This is what distinguishes meaningful resident engagement from situations in which residents may have a very limited opportunity for input (such as through a focus group, a one-time community meeting or a public hearing), but have no continuing, substantive role in the decision-making that shapes the initiatives or policies affecting their families and neighborhoods.
- ◆ **Resident engagement was a means to an end, a crucial mechanism to promote better outcomes for families and neighborhoods.** As explained in a 2009 Casey Foundation publication,⁴ neighborhood residents “are uniquely positioned to tap into existing networks of families and friends to assess needs, get the word out, and mobilize others. Their perspectives... are critical to shaping effective strategies... Without their meaningful involvement and leadership, efforts to achieve deep and lasting results are almost certain to fall short.”
- ◆ **Resident engagement and leadership activities should work in partnership.** While Casey emphasized that residents in the Making Connections sites needed to have meaningful roles participating in and influencing decision-making impacting their communities, the foundation did not envision residents as the sole determinant or final authority for all decisions. That is, although residents were significant partners, and their expertise and perspectives highly valued, Casey understood that many decisions required a collaborative process among a variety of stakeholders. Such collaborative decision-making was seen as crucial in bringing other important partners to the table and helping to ensure that resources from all relevant sectors and sources could be mobilized to address the problems being targeted.
- ◆ **Resident engagement can take many forms and should provide multiple interrelated opportunities for residents.** Building off of its experience in both community and

systems change initiatives, the Casey Foundation engaged and supported numerous activities designed to engage residents. These included a focus on leadership development, community organizing, outreach and mutual support and advocacy. Over time, what became clear was that undertaking a variety of activities and providing opportunities at the same time had a cumulative effect and became mutually reinforcing—leading to greater engagement, more chances for personal involvement and development and more effective action.

The Value of Resident Engagement

Why is supporting resident engagement so important? Is it because it is the fair and just thing to do, and thus represents a value in itself? Or is it because resident engagement leads to better results for low-income families and neighborhoods?

In Casey's view, resident engagement is fundamentally important for **both** reasons. Through prior experience in large-scale community and systems-change initiatives, such as New Futures, Family to Family, Rebuilding Communities Initiative and Plain Talk,⁵ the Foundation understood the importance of engaging residents, families and youth to get better results.

If the goal of an initiative or program is to improve low-income neighborhoods or to achieve better outcomes for the families living in those neighborhoods, it makes sense that the families must be at the center of the work and actively engaged. In part, this reflects the basic values of our democracy regarding opportunities for participation and voice by all citizens. But such participation is especially important for the residents of those communities who suffer the consequences of every decision that negatively affects their neighborhoods, as well as the services geared toward them. They deserve to have a large say in shaping those decisions.

In many community initiatives and service programs running at the time when Making Connections was designed, such participation typically wasn't the case, particularly for communities of color. As one former resident leader in White Center (Seattle) observed:

“There weren't a lot of connections between communities of color, particularly immigrants, and white folks. A lot of decisions and change efforts were disconnected from communities of color.... There weren't a lot of opportunities [in which] we could really insert community voice, especially [by] people of color and refugees and immigrants. We lacked access to locally made decisions ... [The local decision-makers] were well-intended and not necessarily trying to exclude, but they didn't know how to include [the voice of diverse populations].

Sili Savusa, executive director, White Center CDA, Inc.
[5/23/15 interview]

Similarly, another Making Connections resident leader commented on the resulting sense of powerlessness and anger that low-income individuals often feel about the decisions made about them and their neighborhoods:


“For us—people of color—we don't always understand why people [in authority] do things, because we aren't the ones in power making those decisions. We are in poverty. We are struggling.... All we want is a safe place to live, and we have no voice, and no say in what happens. We have to rely on other people to tell us where to live only because we don't have the money. It's hard, and sometimes we don't have a good way to articulate how it makes us feel, so we get loud and we get angry. And often people only hear us or recognize us when we scream and say, “Enough is enough.” And then we get criminalized and blamed as a problem. So it's hard to effectively make change.

Candace Redshirt, Denver resident leader
[7/29/15 interview]

These resident perspectives illustrate the lack of understanding, miscommunication and frequent tension that can too often characterize efforts to involve residents in meaningful roles in community change initiatives. Service providers and other stakeholders acting on behalf of residents often don't know how to include them, particularly if they encounter language or cultural barriers. In addition, residents who have been consistently disenfranchised over time may feel too disempowered to object to individuals making decisions about them and their communities. Another barrier to systematic and effective resident engagement and leadership is the belief among too many officials and organizations that they already know what residents need well enough to represent resident interests without actual community representation at decision-making tables. Officials may also be reluctant to devote the extra time and resources necessary to make the decision-making forums and processes welcoming to residents.

When these barriers are overcome, however, successful resident engagement and leadership can greatly increase the likelihood of success in a community change initiative. When residents have a direct role in positively shaping an initiative and have endorsed it, they are already on board and can be more readily expected to support its implementation. Moreover, resident support is critical not only for implementing change strategies but also for sustaining them.

Following is one small example of neighborhood improvement resulting from resident engagement. Throughout the report, we highlight other examples of individual and community successes, both large and small.



Louisville’s Network Center for Community Change (NC3), a 5,000-member resident network organized with support from Casey, generated a broad range of community improvements over the course of the Making Connections initiative. Dana Jackson Thompson, former site coordinator for Making Connections-Louisville, and the director of NC3 when the Making Connections initiative was phased down, described how members of the Louisville resident network spurred the city to clean up a local playground.

We had our annual “Network Grill” [cook-out] in a park known to be a gang area. We loved being in the park [as a] positive activity that needed to happen there to make the negative activity go away. But we found the condition of the playground was unconscionable: the fence frames were broken, there was broken glass all over, there was concrete jutting out of the mulch. From Saturday [when the grill took place] to Monday, the residents talked together and then talked to the city. [NC3] had developed a history by then of working in partnership with local government. Our members started calling and writing [to city officials], and we activated a quick campaign. Within a week, the park was cleaned up, with new mulch, and the frames fixed.

*Resident
Action Spurs
Playground
Improvements*

The “How” OF RESIDENT ENGAGEMENT AND LEADERSHIP: ACTIVITIES AND LESSONS

One key characteristic of the Making Connections resident engagement efforts—in addition to the fact that Casey supported those efforts over the course of more than 10 years—was the broad range of strategies and activities undertaken. There was considerable variation in the specific activities pursued at different stages of the initiative and from site to site. To help illustrate that variation, we’ve organized the activities into three phases of engagement:⁶

- ◆ Getting Started: Seeding Activities and Relationships
- ◆ Deepening Capacity: Activities for Achieving Results
- ◆ Sustaining Successful Approaches: Embedding Resident Engagement and Leadership

Getting Started: Seeding Resident Activities and Relationships

The implementation of Making Connections began in 22 cities in 2000. These initial cities (see sidebar) were selected based on data relative to child and family need, Casey’s prior work and relationships in each city, the cities’ accomplishments in community change initiatives and evidence of engaged local leadership or strong local interest in the potential of the initiative. In each city, rather than funding a single lead organization, Casey

MAKING CONNECTIONS SITES

The initiative began in 2000 with 22 sites:

Atlanta	Baltimore
Boston	Camden
Denver	Des Moines
Detroit	District of Columbia
Hartford	Indianapolis
Louisville	Miami
Milwaukee	New Orleans
Oakland	Philadelphia
Providence	San Antonio
San Diego	Savannah
Seattle	St. Louis

Between 2002 and 2003, the Casey Foundation settled on 10 sites that had the most potential to implement the full Making Connections agenda:

Denver	Des Moines
Hartford	Indianapolis
Louisville	Milwaukee
Oakland	Providence
San Antonio	Seattle



created local site teams. At most sites, Foundation staff and the local team focused their efforts on particular neighborhoods. These were predominantly low-income neighborhoods with populations ranging from 15,000 to 30,000.⁷

An emphasis during the first few years of the initiative was on identifying promising strategies for improving conditions and outcomes for neighborhoods and families in each of the selected cities. The inclusion of residents in these early discussions was an intentional, core feature of the local planning processes.

The first years (2000–2003) of the Making Connections resident engagement activities can be viewed as a seeding phase, during which the site teams laid the groundwork for their ongoing partnerships with residents. The time was dedicated to devoting much attention to outreach and to building relationships and trust among Foundation staff, site teams and the residents, among the residents themselves, and between the residents and other community stakeholders.

During the seeding phase, residents were engaged in many activities that helped them to connect with their fellow residents, to build trusting and supportive relationships, to collaboratively set priorities for neighborhood improvements and to exercise their collective influence to implement those priorities. The activities included:⁸

- ◆ **Door Knockers:** One of the most effective outreach strategies the sites used involved “door knockers,” which were resident volunteers, community organizers or local team members who knew the neighborhood and went door to door, meeting with families, learning more about their needs, listening to their concerns and sharing information. Sometimes these interactions were conversations on doorsteps. At other times the door knockers would share a meal or join with the families in regular home or child-care routines. These outreach activities were a crucial part of building trusting relationships with residents and often the way that many families first heard about the local Making Connections efforts. The conversations also created opportunities for the door knockers to provide information to the families about community resources that could benefit

household members, and to offer assistance in accessing those resources. Resident leaders commented that the door-knocker activities were particularly important at that time because many low-income households did not have internet access and were therefore limited in their ability to access information about community events or available services. These interactions were also one of the ways that the families were introduced to the idea that, working in partnership with their neighbors, they could have a real impact in improving conditions in their neighborhood. A wide range of resident-led community improvement projects grew out of these outreach conversations.

- ◆ **Family Recreation and Social Activities:** Early on, resident activists and community organizers found that one of the best ways to engage was by holding social, cultural or recreational activities. Community members came to these events because they were fun and offered a social outlet, and they also allowed for discussion of community issues and recruitment of families for longer-term neighborhood improvement efforts. The activists and organizers found that recreational, educational and social activities designed specifically for children were a particularly good way to promote family participation, while also providing more services for local youth. For example, in Milwaukee, local groups organized weekend retreats for neighborhood residents held in areas outside the city. For most, these trips were their first time experiencing camping, fishing and swimming in area lakes. Holding neighborhood events, such as monthly potluck dinners, on a regular basis can help sustain the engagement of residents



If I am not sharing the power with others, I am not leading. Share information, bring opportunities in front of the parents, and be willing to step aside and let others take the baton.

Michelle Gaither McDonald,
co-director of the Hartford
Parent Network
[Orrego, M.E. (2001). *Residents engaged in strengthening families and neighborhoods*.
Baltimore: Annie E. Casey
Foundation, p. 40.]

and build a sense of community among them. The regular interactions helped families from across the neighborhood get to know each other better and promoted improved understanding among diverse groups of residents; they also served as a forum where residents could identify common problems to address together.

- ◆ **Exploring Arts and Culture:** In several sites, building on an existing focus on the arts, activities to deepen cultural awareness and expressions proved effective as a way to promote resident engagement, often across diverse communities. In New Orleans, for example, residents partnered with civic officials, local arts leaders and community residents to produce a photography exhibition highlighting African American families and lifestyles, in a project titled “The Ties That Bind: Making Family New Orleans Style.” In Oakland, the local artist collective known as the Eastside Arts Alliance was a key partner and instrumental in bringing together diverse parts of the community. Early support from Making Connections led to the eventual creation of the Eastside Cultural Center, which included artist space and affordable housing.⁹
- ◆ **Finding Family-Friendly Places:** Residents are more likely to come together if the location for any gathering is a familiar and trusted place. Accordingly, the Making Connections resident engagement activities placed an emphasis on identifying family-friendly places to hold their events—convenient locations that were safe, welcoming and nurturing. It was important to identify a place where families could access the resources and support they desired and where residents could freely express their views, network with others and participate at all levels of decision-making. Across the Making Connections communities, the family-friendly sites varied, depending on residents’ experiences and local culture. Sometimes it was the home of a caring neighbor. Local schools, child-care facilities, churches and faith communities, civic clubs and neighborhood associations also frequently served as gathering places.



TIME DOLLAR programs can strengthen families and take advantage of the skills and talents that residents of all neighborhoods possess. However, these programs require resources to develop, run and sustain.

In addition, initial participation by residents in a Time Dollar program may be less than desired, limiting the service and product choices available. Accordingly, there must be patience in allowing a local Time Dollar program to grow over time, if it is to reach its full potential.

- ◆ **Neighbors Helping Neighbors:** The ultimate purpose of resident engagement is to strengthen families and improve the quality of

their lives. One way for residents to do this is to band together to advocate for better services for their neighborhoods. Another way, however, is for the residents to directly help each other through social networks and mutual support groups.

One example of such an approach, used in many Making Connections sites, is the Time Dollar program,¹⁰ which takes advantage of the strengths and skills that many neighborhood residents already possess. Residents offer their skills and talents to each other and receive Time Dollar credits in return for the assistance they provide. They can then exchange their credits with neighbors for goods and services, including food or cooking, carpentry, electrical work, babysitting and training (on computer skills or for music or dance lessons, etc.).

- ◆ **Family Circles/Neighborhood Circles:** Many sites used family-circle strategies to bring together small groups of residents to show them that their voices and opinions matter, and that they can be effective in creating positive neighborhood change. The resident circles—sometimes known as study¹¹ or neighborhood circles—turn the traditional top-down approach to decision-making on its head by having ordinary

“It was empowering to talk about something that I was passionate about and celebrate that we could do something about it that was successful, and then we could build on it ... the slow crawl [to community change].”

Julie Barrett, discussing her Family Circle experience as an Indianapolis resident
[comment at 5/27/15 consultative convening]

residents take lead roles in framing the decisions and policies that affect their neighborhoods and families. The circles brought neighbors together to talk about the issues that were important to them, consider everyone’s perspective and then identify their own conclusions and creative solutions. Sometimes the resident circles proposed improvement projects that the residents themselves could carry out, such as neighborhood cleanup campaigns, and sometimes they generated recommendations that community organizations or elected officials were urged to embrace and implement.

The duration of the individual resident circles varied, depending on the topics being addressed. But in general, they were designed to be time-limited so that they wouldn’t make excessive demands on residents’ time. Regardless of the duration of a resident circle, the experience helped build understanding among residents from different backgrounds and with different opinions. It also helped residents gain a sense of ownership in their neighborhoods and created opportunities for neighbors to interact and develop working relationships with other key stakeholders in the community—including local school representatives, police officers, elected officials, agency leaders and members of the business community.

◆ **Small Grant Programs:** One of the most highly effective strategies that the Making Connections sites used to encourage and support small-scale, resident-defined neighborhood projects were small grant programs. To establish these programs, the Casey Foundation and local funders created a modest pool of money that residents could access for projects they had initiated. On some occasions, the residents themselves were directly involved in raising and distributing the funds for the projects (which is another effective way to engage residents and build their capacity and self-efficacy skills). In Boston, for example, grants have supported neighborhood cleanups, block parties, cultural activities, planning for a community garden, instruments for a drum and bugle corps for young people, a baseball club that engages more than 70 boys, life-skills workshops, a summer camp for girls and much more.¹² Across the Making Connections sites, these small grant program funds were used to support many projects that improved neighborhoods and brought residents together, including playground cleanups, after-school programs, block safety associations, job banks and weekly family evenings.

◆ **Community Mapping Efforts:** As part of the Making Connections work around neighborhood planning, residents in some sites conducted community mapping, which involved going block to block to talk with families, local shop keepers,

faith leaders and other stakeholders, documenting the physical and human assets that the neighborhood possessed, as well as the unmet needs to be addressed. These efforts provided residents with a map of community assets and deficits—identifying local businesses (grocery stores, banks, check-cashing locations, libraries, etc.) or the lack thereof. By highlighting assets as well as deficits, they communicated

the first phase of the initiative, Casey funded each Making Connections site to establish a “local learning partnership,” or LLP. The LLPs were groups of local people and organizations with data-related interests or expertise who collaborated to support the local Making Connections activities by using data to help in specifying desired outcomes, performance measures and strategies to achieve results and by creating an ongoing learning community to monitor results and promote collective reflection.

The LLPs represented an opportunity for residents to develop or enhance their skills at accessing, analyzing and using data to better understand neighborhood and citywide conditions, highlight inequities, build the case for appropriate responses to address those inequities and monitor progress to promote accountability for results. It also represented a vehicle for residents to develop strong working relationships with other community stakeholders and influential entities.¹³

◆ **Community Summits:** Many Making Connections sites used community summits as a way to stimulate resident engagement. At these summits (which were sometimes organized around a particular subject, such as education or public safety), groups of residents were presented with data on neighborhood conditions and on how their neighborhood (and the well-being of families and children living there) compared with other communities. These presentations were helpful in making the challenges that the neighborhood faced more explicit and concrete, and they were helpful in highlighting existing disparities in available resources and outcomes. The presentations led to discussions among the residents, in which problems and challenges were prioritized and residents began to share their ideas on how to respond. At some sites, these discussions resulted in the creation of resident-led workgroups that subsequently researched the issues more thoroughly and developed detailed proposals for addressing the problems that were then presented to the community or public officials for endorsement and adoption.

“LOCAL LEARNING PARTNERSHIPS CAN EMPOWER NEIGHBORHOODS

We hope the work of the LLPs can serve ... a neighborhood empowerment function. They have the potential of strengthening neighborhood voices and resident partners and leaders by equipping them with accessible and influential ways of expressing inequities [and] disparate impacts.

Doug Nelson, former president and CEO, Annie E. Casey Foundation

a more complete and balanced picture of the targeted neighborhood than the view that many (including outsiders and some neighborhood residents) had previously held and provided the empirical data that resident groups needed to buttress their proposals to elected officials and funders for expanded services or other improvement initiatives.

◆ **Resident Partnership in Local Learning Partnerships:** During



One of the [key resident engagement strategies] to hold onto is relationship-building—and [one] cannot do that without trust. A lot of things need to happen ... to build relationships [of trust], and this takes time depending on the situation, for people to hear you and feel they are being listened to ... When people feel you're listening to them [it makes a difference], but you still have to prove yourself.

Julie Barrett, advocacy consultant and former Indianapolis resident leader [comment at 5/27/15 consultative convening]



Lessons Learned

Following are several key lessons that resident leaders and other stakeholders identified as important during the seeding phase of engagement.

It is crucial to adopt a customized approach to resident engagement, at both a neighborhood and individual level.

Although some aspects of the resident engagement activities across the Making Connections sites reflected common strategies, the overall experience demonstrated that there is more than one way to promote resident engagement. Each site used somewhat differing approaches to engage residents, reflecting local cultures, community histories and the assets upon which their efforts were able to draw.

In developing a customized approach, start by conducting a scan to assess what resident leadership capacity, networks and resident-centered organizations already exist. Solicit input on what issues are important enough for residents to mobilize around, and intentionally seek to build from this foundation and these insights.

The Making Connections experience demonstrates that many factors may initially motivate residents to get involved in neighborhood or community improvement activities. Consequently, resident engagement efforts need to be sensitive and responsive to the range of issues or factors that can act as catalysts to activism for individuals. They can do this by first listening closely to what residents say about their concerns and aspirations, and then by finding ways to make the residents feel comfortable in getting and staying involved in the work, regardless of the issues or events that originally brought them to the table.

The seeding phase is a critical first step in resident engagement.

The Making Connections experience showed that building relationships and trust among residents was crucial to establishing and sustaining successful resident engagement; however, the experience also demonstrated that such relationship-building can take considerable time. As a result, many Making Connections resident leaders concluded that it is vitally important to have a seeding (or germination) phase in the resident engagement activities to cultivate and grow those relationships before expecting resident engagement efforts to generate substantial results.

The sites found that activities such as family or neighborhood circles and mutual support groups can be excellent mechanisms for promoting dialogue and building trust among residents. These groups not only are a way to initially engage residents but also can serve as ongoing sources of support for them, in addition to helping to sustain collective action. Another benefit of these groups is that they provide opportunities for the emergence of new resident leaders, as individuals become more comfortable and confident in their voices and abilities through group activities.

According to the resident leaders, the seeding phase was not just about building relationships among residents. It was also about residents establishing trust and effective working relationships with elected officials, service providers, funders and other key stakeholders in the community. These relationships were instrumental to the creation of partnerships that could leverage broader sets of resources and expand the residents' influence in fostering improved policies and services to benefit community members.



Deepening Capacity: Resident Engagement Activities Geared Toward Achieving Results

After a period of intense negotiation, Making Connections leadership and local sites agreed on five broad results to work toward through their implementation activities, and developed strategies for increasing employment, education and skill-building, assets and access to high-quality early care and education. The deepening engagement efforts advanced these strategies by deploying residents as agents of outreach and engagement and inviting them to participate in leadership groups charged with making progress toward the broad results. It was also an opportunity to strengthen residents' leadership skills and ability to advocate effectively for themselves and their communities.

Site-Specific Engagement Approaches

Using the relationships built earlier in the initiative, sites employed numerous activities between 2004 and 2007 to engage residents in improving results for children and families. Many sites continued such activities as small grant programs, study/family circles and neighborhood outreach, but these efforts were more closely tied to the priority result areas. We highlight some of the activities in different sites in this section.

- ◆ **Network Building:** Louisville site team members began working to refine their approach to engagement and create more of a network of residents and local stakeholders. The new approach began by enlisting neighborhood leaders to serve as resident organizing coordinators (ROCs). The ROCs knocked on every door in their four target neighborhoods to

recruit people to the network and invited them to Network Nights. Over time, the coordinators became what were called “power members” of the network who provided training and skill-building to others and served as connectors to resources and opportunities. Their efforts helped lay the groundwork for the Network, which grew to include more than 5,000 members.

“

I’m a strong believer in “accidental leadership.” One doesn’t know where these folks [i.e., new resident leaders] will emerge from.

Lena Hackett, former Making Connections-Indianapolis site coordinator [comments at 5/27/15 consultative convening]



RESULTS



FAMILIES

will have increased earnings and income.



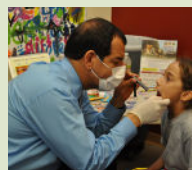
FAMILIES

will have increased levels of assets.



FAMILIES

will have increased civic participation.



FAMILIES

will have access to services and other supports.



CHILDREN

will be healthy and prepared to succeed in school.

- ◆ **Trusted Advocates:** The Seattle White Center’s trusted advocates were resident leaders who represented each of the more than 40 racial and ethnic groups living in the Seattle target neighborhood. They were closely involved in all aspects of the site’s results-focused efforts. Community meetings were held with real-time translation assistance in more than 20 languages, funded by the local leadership to ensure all residents could participate equally. As the trusted advocates became more deeply engaged in the site’s substantive programmatic strategies, they attended numerous skill-building and leadership training sessions to become trainers themselves, helping develop a set of resident leaders from community organizations who were able to take up move active roles in their neighborhood.
- ◆ **Promotoras:** In many communities, there was a long history of Latino resident leaders serving as promotoras, who are individuals trained to provide health outreach to families to

make them aware of available resources (but not certified health professionals themselves). Using the success of that model, two Making Connections sites, Providence and San Antonio, received training for additional promotoras to do outreach and engagement on the availability of early child care and family, friend and neighbor care for young children. They also trained promotoras to assist in the annual earned income tax credit campaign to ensure more residents were aware of and able to access the tax credit and were informed about how they could open a savings account at a local credit union.

- ◆ **School Readiness Ambassadors:** Many sites that were already engaged with their local schools and had identified parents of young children through outreach efforts recruited one or more parents to be school readiness ambassadors. They were trained to educate other families about what it takes for children to be prepared to succeed in school and to connect families with high-quality child care providers and other resources.
- ◆ **Leadership Development:** Making Connections' leadership training efforts were designed to build the knowledge and skills of residents so that they could assume larger roles in collaborating with their neighbors and in leading efforts to improve their community and outcomes among neighborhood families. San Antonio invested in the Community Leadership Development Collaborative, a partnership with local colleges, youth development programs and faith-based organizations, to provide leadership training to more than 1,000 residents. Graduates became advocates for policy change, got elected to the city council and were routinely asked to join boards and commissions. Providence supported a local leadership institute, from which more than 160 residents graduated and went on to advocate for more parent involvement in schools, reducing predatory lending and implementing "Play & Learn" groups that provide early childhood services to children.¹⁴ Graduates also developed a family, friend and neighbor (FFN) child-care provider network to increase access to early childhood education resources, in addition to financial education and asset-building services that were part of Making Connections.¹⁵

Cross-Site Activities

In addition to the investments sites made or the Foundation supported locally, CSSP and Casey dedicated additional resources to peer learning and leadership development activities that were available to all sites. Following are the key strategies put in place to support learning and skill-building across the initiative.

Peer-to-Peer Technical Assistance Matches

As previously mentioned, technical assistance was an integral part of the learning and relationship-building in Making Connections.¹⁶ One form of that assistance, developed originally by CSSP, was structured learning through the form of "peer matches,"¹⁷ which are opportunities for groups from two or more communities working on a similar issue or challenge to exchange

experiences and practical knowledge to solve the problem together. The matches brought teams of peers together through careful matchmaking, and the groups analyzed questions at hand and developed options for action. In this way, peer matches capitalized on the knowledge and expertise of people working on the ground to support families and strengthen communities.¹⁸ Residents were often the drivers of and participants in peer technical assistance and were involved in many peer matches with local site team leaders and civic and organizational partners that shaped site work and allowed them to build long-lasting relationships with their counterparts around the country.

A few examples of these peer matches include:

- ◆ **Connecting Residents to Integrated Neighborhood Services.** In 2003, a team from the White Center traveled to the San Francisco Bay Area to meet with two organizations that have implemented initiatives focused on comprehensive service integration. The team's aim was to explore and refine options in developing a resident-friendly model for integrating neighborhood services. (Learn more at <http://bit.ly/MC-CRINS>.)
- ◆ **Building Resident Engagement in a Community Collaborative.** A team from Oakland, California, traveled to Lawrence, Massachusetts, to learn about the engagement strategies that the latter used to successfully build a base of involved residents in its community, with the goal of informing similar efforts back home. (Learn more at <http://bit.ly/MC-BRECC>.)
- ◆ **Community Involvement in Schools.** A team from Indianapolis, Indiana, traveled to Denver, Colorado, for a peer consultation about engaging parents and community members in efforts to convert large high schools into smaller ones. The team sought to learn about the benefits and challenges of increased parent involvement in schools, as well as strategies to develop and support parent and community involvement. (Learn more at <http://bit.ly/MC-CIS>.)
- ◆ **Engaging Youth in Community Change.** Teams from Hartford and Providence partnered with an organization in Boston to learn about developing youth-organizing strategies to engage young people in data collection so that they could learn more about their neighborhoods and use that information to advocate for social change. Youth were encouraged to work with other peers and community partners to create action agendas based on the data they collected and the issues they most wanted to tackle. (Learn more at <http://bit.ly/MC-EYCC>.)

Resident Leadership and Facilitation Training

As sites began developing more cohesive strategies to make progress toward their core results and continued to engage residents more deeply in their efforts, the Casey Foundation increased its investment in building residents' skills by offering Resident Leadership and Facilitation (RLF) training sessions in local sites. The RLF training was a leadership development and capacity-building strategy jointly developed by the Foundation's Leadership Development unit and Technical Assistance Resource Center (TARC), which was managed by CSSP.

PRINCIPLES OF THE RESIDENT LEADERSHIP FACILITATION TRAINING

- ◆ Build on deeply rooted belief in the capability of residents to learn and employ the necessary skills.
- ◆ Curriculum, training design and delivery recognizes and respects the different cultures, languages, learning styles, wisdom and experiences of participants.
- ◆ Use diverse coaching staff that modeled shared leadership across race and gender.
- ◆ Based on the view that people learn best when they have the opportunity to practice and discover for themselves, using experiential learning strategies.
- ◆ Meetings should lead to decisions and focus on achieving results.
- ◆ There are no observers—everyone participates fully.



The RLF curriculum was designed to help resident leaders build and enhance their skills in leading successful meetings that result in action. While the primary focus of the two-day training was increasing facilitation skills, the sessions also helped residents identify themselves as leaders and increased their confidence in being effective, whether they were participating, facilitating or chairing meetings. In addition, the training enabled them to build long-lasting relationships with fellow trainees and with the experts in results-based community planning and development who served as trainers. Because of the close relationships they developed, these trainers often transitioned into roles as coaches or mentors.

partnership with the coaches.

As a result of the training, participants better understood the roles and responsibilities of a facilitator. They also learned how to engage other residents in making decisions about taking actions that will produce results by using an approach that respects and values diverse opinions and backgrounds and helps resolve difficult dynamics and disagreements. Participants were able to take up increasingly responsible leadership positions, use their skills to facilitate meetings in their community and continue building the capacity of other residents and community partners at home.

SOME PERSPECTIVES ON RESIDENT LEADERSHIP TRAINING ACTIVITIES

The rhetoric of past community development initiatives tended toward telling residents that they had opportunities—but not giving them the resources they needed to take advantage of those opportunities—or giving resources without providing an understanding of the opportunities to put them to use. To truly empower residents, you need to give them resources, skills, knowledge and the opportunity to apply them.

Mustapha Abdul Salaam, community leader, New Haven, CT
[Orrego, M.E. (2001). *Residents engaged in strengthening families and neighborhoods*. Baltimore: Annie E. Casey Foundation, p. 42.]

The Casey Foundation sponsored the RLF training sessions, which were offered at each local site, co-designed by resident participants in advance and provided to residents who were already, or wanted to be, involved in leadership. A team of two to three highly skilled coaches led the training, often alongside coaches-in-training who were building their skills before leading their own sessions. Sites also selected resident leaders to plan and design the sessions, in

Over time, the training was offered in English and Spanish—sometimes simultaneously. Sites requested additional training opportunities for those unable to attend the first session. The continued interest ultimately led to the development of an advanced curriculum, RLF 201, which trained graduates of the initial class to lead RLF 101 for other groups of local residents.

Resident Leadership Network

During the implementation of Making Connections, the Casey Foundation invited small teams of resident leaders from each site to attend a Resident Leadership Network meeting in Baltimore, in hopes of providing an opportunity for them to extend their skills and create a network across the 10 sites that could reinforce and support each other as they worked to strengthen opportunities for other residents back home. Each site sent a team of six to eight residents, many of whom had been through RLF 101 or 201. After the first convening, teams of resident leaders were brought together semiannually over the next six years. Many of the attendees at the first meeting continued to participate, bringing in new residents at each convening so others could have the same experience and build their own network of other leaders across the country and get to know Casey and CSSP staff. The network grew in numbers and strength, and before long, the residents were planning and facilitating the network meetings themselves, though not without requiring a shift in the power dynamic between resident leaders and Casey and CSSP staff (see *Addressing Power Dynamics* sidebar, p. 22).

During the meetings, residents led portions of the RLF training, heard about effective strategies for engaging others, learned more about the core results areas and best practices and addressed issues, such as race, class and power, which impacted their work. Each meeting included a trip to learn about work on the ground in Baltimore and provided time for residents to work

together and problem-solve as peers across sites. It also provided an opportunity for teams to check in about how well their community was implementing resident engagement. They used a tool called “10 Tough Questions” to help hold their community accountable.



10 TOUGH QUESTIONS REGARDING RESIDENT ENGAGEMENT

1

In my site, how do resident leaders plan/co-design their capacity-building/ leadership-development opportunities?

2

How does my site engage resident leaders in leadership roles in the initiative?

3

How does my site expand the decision-making authority of resident leaders?

4

How does my site work with strategic partners to create decision-making roles for residents?

5

Does my site hire residents as staff members, trainers, technical assistance providers, consultants, etc.?

6

How does my site support networks of resident leaders?

7

What is the process my site has for mentoring new resident leaders?

8

What opportunities do resident leaders in my site have to build relationships with partners?

9

How does my site support the ability of residents to mobilize other residents around results that matter to them?

10

In what ways do resident leaders in my site have access to information that drives decision-making?

BONUS QUESTION

What tools and technical assistance resources do resident leaders in my site have access to, to learn from other sites and other models?

Addressing Power Dynamics in the Resident Engagement Work

In late 2004, at the end of a three-day Resident Leaders Network (RLN) meeting, the discussion turned to planning for the next meeting. Several of the resident leaders questioned why they were being asked to provide feedback and input into the meeting design but were not given responsibility for planning and facilitating the meeting themselves. They shared that since they had become part of the network and most had received the RLF training at least once, they felt that they were as qualified to play that role as were Casey and CSSP staff. The resident leaders asked to meet privately with Foundation leadership and requested that they be given responsibility to plan the meeting. Because of the trust built between them and staff, each side listened well to the other. Staff acknowledged their need to step back and share power with the residents, and to allow the latter to take more control in shaping the design and content of their network meetings. They also recognized the benefits of creating opportunities for even more resident voice. Accordingly, the group agreed to form a meeting planning team led by residents, with staff serving in support roles and only doing more as requested by the resident leaders.

Donna Stark, who coordinated Casey’s RLN staff and led the Leadership Development unit, reflected on this experience:



There was an evolution in the relationship between [Casey’s] RLN staff and residents, with the residents having an increasing level of comfort to call us on the [lack of] alignment between our talk and our actions.



Lessons Learned



The following are lessons that resident leaders and other stakeholders identified as important during this phase focused on deepening capacity to achieve better results for kids and families in the target neighborhoods.

The essential role of resident skill-building and networking and the need for continuing technical assistance/skill-building and peer support groups. The intentional investment in skill-building and technical assistance was an essential component of the success of Making Connections. The skills residents gained through the Resident Leadership and Facilitation training have continued to benefit them as individuals, in addition to benefitting countless other residents and partners. All of the residents interviewed for this report stressed how important it was to not only build their confidence and ability to lead and facilitate meetings but also to help them see themselves as leaders and to be able to do the same for others. Casey and CSSP's continued support of the RLF training in sites over a sustained period of time grounded the skills in those communities and built partnerships between national organizations and resident leaders, many of which turned into ongoing consulting and coaching relationships. At the same time, the investment in bringing together teams of residents from across the sites to develop a network of leaders was powerful and influential, as their collective knowledge and skills helped shape Casey's thinking and programmatic investments in new and significant ways.

The resident leaders in the network gained insight into the ways the issues they were addressing in their own neighborhoods were systemic in nature and began shaping their ideas for having an impact on a national level, across neighborhoods.

Casey's efforts to support the Resident Leadership Network (RLN) at the national level also reflected these customized engagement approaches. RLN activities offered opportunities for resident leaders to customize their learning and skill development so that they could pursue those neighborhood improvement and leadership activities that were most important to them. Recognizing that individuals often need time to feel comfortable in assuming additional responsibilities or more substantial leadership roles, RLN training also allowed residents to acquire skills and take on new responsibilities at their own pace.

These activities—the RLF training and the RLN—were major investments by Casey and CSSP that continue to reap benefits for

them and residents. In more ways than one, these were considered the two most meaningful investments that directly increased residents' ability to be effective, more so than any other Making Connections efforts.

The importance of residents' ability to use data strategically.

Several resident leaders indicated that one of the most important skills that they acquired during Making Connections was learning how to use data more effectively. They spoke about the empowering and transformative process of developing expertise on how to access and understand different types of data and learning how to use data to highlight problems, suggest possible solutions and promote accountability by tracking progress and results. Residents indicated that their heightened ability to use data helped to put them on a more equal footing when dealing with elected officials, public agencies, service providers, funders and other powerful interests whose decisions impacted their communities and families.

Residents developed their ability to use data through different activities. A few examples include:

- ◆ As part of residents' efforts to influence schools, or in other resident-led advocacy campaigns, community organizers or members of the local Making Connections team would show residents the types and sources of available data that they could use to document problems and to build their case for the changes they were seeking. In essence, this was on-the-job training, showing the practical and strategic use of data.
- ◆ Results-Based Accountability™ training is a simple, commonsense framework for thinking in a more disciplined way about community conditions and needs, how to take positive action relative to those needs and how to measure results. Results-Based Accountability training for residents proved to be particularly important in helping them become stronger participants in the programmatic work of the Making Connections sites focused on improving early childhood education and workforce development services.
- ◆ The local learning partnerships (LLP) established in each Making Connections site provided more opportunities to strengthen residents' data skills, as the LLPs focused on compiling, analyzing and reporting data on an intensive, continuous basis. In fact, some residents became so proficient that they subsequently obtained data-related jobs conducting surveys and interviews or reporting on community indicators.

Candace Redshirt, a member of the resident staff of the Community Learning Network (Denver's LLP), describes the broader perspective, skills and lessons she gleaned from her experience:

“

Seeing how people can use information as power—the skill set of understanding data and telling the story and making the connection between, for example, the number of kids getting free school lunches and the high rates of poverty in the neighborhood, and seeing how surrounding that [area] was a circle of neighborhoods with more money—it was powerful. When you walk around the neighborhood, these were things you could feel, but now to have the data and the story to understand it. And being able to tell the story, develop partnerships and identify ways to address it was so important.

The numbers and the data can be misinterpreted, if residents aren't there to explain the story behind the data. Really helping residents to understand how to use data and teaching them [and] building their skills to be able to unpack the data was very effective. Project Wise [a local consultant] worked with us on community-based research. We pushed back and asked that residents be the ones going out to do the surveys because it would build the capacity of those who lived there and would give them skills that could help them get jobs with the Census Bureau (which many did) to help administer Census surveys.

Candace Redshirt [7/29/15 interview]

It is worth noting that a number of the resident leaders interviewed for this report indicated that they found the local learning partnership data work to be some of the most challenging Making Connections activities because of the terminology, research methods and statistical concepts they had to learn. At the same time, however, they stressed that enabling residents to acquire the skills to collect and use data—to own the data—is one of the most powerful ways to help residents to foster system change.

Funders and agencies must change their own behavior.

The Making Connections experience demonstrated that not only residents can benefit from acquiring new skills and interacting in new ways. If funders, service providers and other community institutions are serious about resident engagement, they themselves may also need to learn to operate in a different manner. Among the things that funders, agencies, and other officials need to do:

- ◆ **Show commitment to resident engagement for the long haul.** Funders, agencies and community officials can do

this by formally acknowledging that support for resident engagement needs to be an ongoing area of investment for them and their partners.

- ◆ **Learn how to listen.** This includes accepting residents as they are and recognizing that although residents may not use professional jargon to express themselves, their opinions and insights into the problems their communities face, and potential solutions to those problems, are invaluable.

- ◆ **Demonstrate tolerance for pushback.** Residents are not always going to agree with the approaches that the “experts” propose. Nor should they. For residents to exercise real power, they will need to define their own path, which may mean disagreeing (sometimes quite forcibly) with the plans that officials or institutions have crafted. This is particularly true if those plans were developed without their input. Funders, agencies and officials need to recognize that such pushback is an essential element of meaningful resident engagement.

- ◆ **Recognize the levels and types of support needed to effectively promote resident engagement activities.** Considerations include planning the scheduling and location of meetings so that they are convenient for residents to attend. The availability of child care and food at meetings, transportation assistance and translation services is also among the kinds of support that is essential for encouraging broader resident participation in community meetings and other activities. To make the decision-making forums welcoming to residents, it is also important to help them prepare for their participation at these sessions and to assist them in developing public speaking, presentation, meeting-facilitation and data analysis skills so that they operate on a level playing field with the professionals, officials and institutions at the decision-making tables. The latter is particularly important for meaningful resident input and an equitable sharing of power.

- ◆ **Value residents' time.** Staff members from agencies or funders receive compensation for the time they spend attending community meetings; they also should value residents' time. One way of doing this is to find mechanisms (such as honoraria or special paid positions) to financially compensate residents who devote large portions of their time to community improvement activities.

“

It's about the [funders] learning how to listen, [even] when the time in meetings was so packed. Internalizing what that means [listening to residents]—funders really need to be willing to let go of some of the norms and behave in a certain way. [They need to recognize] that residents don't need to change. They just need more skills. And in the meantime, the funders need to be able to listen in the way residents are able to express themselves, without passing judgment.

Sili Savusa, executive director,
White Center CDA, Inc.
(and Seattle resident leader)
[comments at 5/27/15
consultative convening]

- ◆ **Provide support for resident engagement in ways that multiply impact.** Funders, agencies and public officials should be creative in identifying ways that their support for resident engagement can generate a multiplier effect, such as by hiring local teenagers to provide the child care at community meetings.
- ◆ **Act in a transparent, non-defensive manner.** Funders, agencies and officials can show their openness by consistently demonstrating a willingness to share information with residents. They also need to become better at accepting legitimate criticism from residents and at publicly acknowledging shortcomings. Although this can be challenging, it's crucial for establishing open and honest dialogue.
- ◆ **Recognize the time required to achieve results from resident engagement activities.** Earlier in this report, we discussed the substantial time that it can take for residents to build trusting relationships with each other, and with other community stakeholders, as well as the time required to acquire the skills they need to be effective in their advocacy. Funders and agencies supporting resident engagement need to keep that in mind and avoid placing unreasonable expectations on the resident engagement work, whether in terms of participation or achieving significant results in the short term.

Appreciate the value of and unavoidable tensions inherent in resident engagement. Resident leaders interviewed for this report indicated that strong disagreements with partners or funders, setbacks in advocacy campaigns or other conflicts are common features of their resident engagement work. But rather than bemoaning such incidents, the resident leaders argued that these challenges represent opportunities to demonstrate

resilience and to show residents that you will stick with them and advocate for their interests through thick and thin.

The Making Connections resident engagement experience showed that, to aggressively advocate for community interests, it's sometimes necessary for resident leaders and groups to make other people, such as service providers, public officials and funders, uncomfortable. However, because resident groups will want to build and sustain productive working relationships with these entities and other individuals, the rationale for their pushback or demands should be clearly spelled out, and the discussions should be approached with civility. Moreover, it's essential for everyone to be entirely aboveboard and transparent in the ensuing discussions and be willing to make adjustments to arrive at a mutual solution.

“Parents should be paid for their time, and paid equitably. After all, parents are the glue for a lot of people’s work.”

Michelle Gaither
McDonald, co-director,
Hartford Parent
Network [Orrego
(2001), p. 19]

Also, the Making Connection’s experience demonstrated that a resident group’s occasionally tense relationships with officials, funders or partners are more likely to be successfully resolved if all parties involved have established a preexisting level of trust, which requires an intentional commitment on all sides.

Sustaining Successful Approaches: Embedding Resident Engagement and Leadership

During the final years of the initiative (2007–2011), communities zeroed in on successful implementation strategies that were making the greatest difference for families and deepened their partnerships to focus on sustaining results.

Communities moved increasingly toward identifying ways to expand their impact and increase the capacity of resident leaders. For some, this meant pursuing additional leadership development training. In San Antonio, for example, resident leaders received two rounds of training on leadership transformation and systems of oppression, which resulted in a more broadly held vision of what leadership meant to them. The training also identified ways

for partners and residents to work better together by sharing power and increasing transparency. In Providence, a series of resident retreats was held using a Results-Based Accountability framework to develop a strategic plan for the role residents could play in the site work moving forward.

Sites also increased their focus on engaging parents by forming stronger partnerships with neighborhood elementary schools. In Louisville, resident organizers engaged parents to participate in a reading center to increase child and adult literacy. In Providence, a family, friend and neighbor care network of community residents worked closely with the site team and partners to build their capacity as leaders in the community to improve the quality of home-based child care.

Several sites focused on addressing the issues of race, class and power that continued to influence their neighborhoods and their efforts to impact systems. Many participated in “Undoing Racism,” a multi-ethnic training that teaches about institutional, structural and individual racism. Others learned about how to apply a racial equity lens to their efforts to achieve better results, ensuring that strategies had an equitable impact and benefitted those most in need.

REAL Coordinators

As sites identified people to take a lead role in managing strategy implementation (family economic success coaches and school readiness coordinators), they increasingly saw a need for someone to coordinate the leadership and manage the activities of their resident engagement approach. Each site identified a Residents

Engaged in Action and Leadership (REAL) coordinator.

REAL coordinators oversaw resident engagement efforts in each site, serving as liaisons with other resident leaders and as part of the local management team and participating in a cross-site network with other

coordinators to share information,

best practices and challenges with their peers. The group met monthly via phone and in small groups during large cross-site management meetings.

REAL coordinators also had opportunities to learn from other communities about strategies that could inform their work back home. For example, in 2007, they traveled to New Orleans for a national convening after Hurricane Katrina to discuss issues and challenges facing community organizers as they worked to ensure residents had a voice in rebuilding their neighborhoods. They shared their collective wisdom to learn how all of their respective communities could do a better job at ensuring that they were more inclusive and that their work benefitted all neighborhood residents.



The key [to effective resident advocacy] is asking the right probing questions—and to keep asking them until you're given answers or [the officials] relinquish and start listening to a different view—even if it involves getting people uncomfortable.

Julie Barrett, advocacy consultant and former Indianapolis resident leader [comment at 5/27/15 consultative convening]

Increased Leadership Roles

Resident leaders have played and continue to play a variety of roles in their communities. Many have been elected to local civic leadership, as members of school boards, city council representatives, etc. Some have gone on to work in mayors' or governors' offices, leading community-organizing and development efforts that continue to impact their neighborhoods and cities. Others have taken on staff positions, ranging from paid positions as community organizers to program leads and executive directors. Still others have started their own businesses. At least three have begun their own consulting firms, providing training, facilitation and coaching, often using a curriculum they developed themselves (as well as the tools they acquired during Making Connections). Almost all of the residents who were active in the Resident Leadership Network became prominent leaders in their community and are still involved in substantive roles through which they aim to improve the lives of their friends and neighbors.

Continued Efforts to Build Community Capacity

The neighborhoods also changed. The capacity built as a result of the Making Connections resident engagement training, skill-building and partnership development laid the groundwork for more involvement between community-based partners, resident groups and city leadership. As a result, many of the Making Connections sites went on to receive philanthropic and federal funding to continue their neighborhood transformation efforts and to push for progress on achieving core results.

Several sites successfully applied for a grant under the federal Promise Neighborhoods initiative, a community-based effort taking a cradle-to-career approach to supporting children and families. Others received funding to improve affordable housing through the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development's Choice Neighborhoods program, which promotes resident engagement in revitalizing public housing developments. Still others pursued opportunities related to criminal justice reform, building sustainable communities and partnering with regional stakeholders for broader community transformation efforts. The Making Connections legacy is reflected in the resident involvement in all these efforts, as well as the increased capacity for using data, strong partnerships and innovative approaches that helped secure new federal and philanthropic support.



A SHIFT IN MANAGEMENT – AND ITS IMPACT ON RESIDENT ENGAGEMENT

As the Casey Foundation began to look ahead to the end of its 10-year investment, it recognized that having an anchor organization to sustain and continue the Making Connections efforts was essential. In most sites, the process of finding an appropriate anchor partner was time-consuming and challenging, and the selection of a management partner brought new players to the table, including individuals in leadership roles who had not been informed by the insights that the local site team had previously gained about doing community change work in meaningful partnership with residents. In some of the sites, resident leaders were deeply involved in the deliberations about who would manage the continuing work, whereas in others, their role was limited. Similarly, the level of continuing local emphasis on resident engagement following a new partner's selection, and the specific types of activities supported, varied by site—even though Casey and CSSP had made clear to all anchor partners that they needed to maintain resident engagement as a component of the local work.



Lessons Learned

Resident leaders and other stakeholders identified several key lessons as important when considering how to sustain any community change initiative or effort focused on maintaining and supporting ongoing resident engagement.

Start the sustainability discussions as early as possible. In reflecting upon Making Connections, or upon similar community change initiatives (particularly those led by a national funder), it's useful to recognize that the issues residents and others face in their communities, as well as some of the activities focused on addressing them, existed before the initiative began and will continue after its end. This suggests that it's crucial for change initiatives to focus on building sustained capacity to have lasting impact and value. Sustainability has to be a consistent

theme throughout the initiative. Moreover, resident engagement needs to be viewed as an essential ingredient for ongoing community health, not just part of a particular initiative.

For these reasons, it's a mistake to leave discussions about how to sustain resident engagement activities until the end of a community change initiative. There's likely to be turnover in key staff or new individuals in management roles; these individuals may have different perspectives on the value of resident engagement, potentially disrupting institutional support for the engagement activities.

Also, local partners are likely to focus on securing new sources

of funding for other purposes, making it challenging for them to devote significant attention to finding funding specifically for continuing with resident engagement. Moreover, securing funding takes time, so even if there is a concerted effort at the end of an initiative to maintain the engagement activities, there is still likely to be a period before such resources are in hand, leading to a disruption or loss of momentum in those activities. Therefore, the best approach is to begin much earlier in the initiative, ideally at its outset, to identify ways to sustain resident engagement for the long run. This process should involve convening residents and other stakeholders to co-design resident-centered partnership strategies with sustainability in mind.

In the transition at the end of initiatives, establish an explicit understanding regarding the commitment to resident

engagement. In the transfer of authority or responsibility at the end of an initiative, create explicit, across-the-board agreements, implementation capacity and accountability metrics regarding shared power, commitment to racial inclusion and equity and ongoing support for resident engagement and leadership development.

Develop a coherent, unified and uniformly supported investment strategy for resident engagement among funders.

Resident engagement needs to be supported on a long-term basis, but an individual funder will be reluctant to make that commitment alone. However, a group of funders who join together to support resident engagement activities will reduce the burden, while maintaining a more consistent flow of resources for the resident engagement work over time.

It's important to acknowledge, however, that the funders may have diverging points of view regarding resident engagement. Consequently, the development of a common investment strategy will require addressing and resolving any differences among their respective philosophies about the role of resident engagement and the best ways to support it. This may be challenging, but in the interest of sustaining resident engagement, it is important for the funders to get on the same page.

Funders can strengthen their mutual commitment to supporting resident engagement in a couple ways:

- ◆ Explicitly connect the resident engagement technical assistance and capacity-building activities to the other substantive areas in which the funders have interest (e.g., education, public safety, health, etc.) and clearly illustrate how resident engagement will contribute to outcomes in those areas.
- ◆ Adopt appropriate performance measures and a results-driven agenda for the resident engagement work (while setting realistic time frames for what is to be accomplished). People spend their time and energy on what gets measured; having clear performance measures will give funders confidence that there is accountability relative to their resident engagement investments. The performance data will provide clear documentation of areas seeing progress and those that have not and promote reflection that can inform appropriate adjustments to strategies to improve future performance.

Although fostering a results orientation for resident engagement is important, it is also vital for funders to be willing to invest at least a portion of their resources in innovative or experimental efforts relative to such engagement. While the latter may have a lower probability of success (at least in the short term), they are essential for the resident engagement field to learn and



[Resident engagement] needs to be seen as part of the larger system of change ... If you don't build the capacity of residents to be intimately engaged in the process, you're dead in the water. Make it an essential part; weave it into the whole process as part of a powerful strategy for change.

Dana Jackson Thompson,
former Making
Connections-Louisville
site coordinator [7/17/15
interview]

grow. Consequently, if funders are truly interested in learning while doing, they should develop tolerance for the trial-and-error process that is an inevitable part of the development of innovative practices.

Design the support for resident engagement to maximize the resources that go directly to the residents. Whether done as

part of a larger initiative or as stand-alone funding, the support for resident engagement should maximize the resources that go to the residents themselves, rather than to intermediaries. For example:

- ◆ Provide resident groups with direct access to flexible funding so that they can decide how best to apply the funds (as opposed to others deciding for them).
- ◆ Establish small grant programs that provide an ongoing source of funding allocations to support resident-led efforts that can have a substantial impact.

Develop mechanisms to provide residents with

ongoing access to technical assistance, training, tools and peer support groups. In addition to direct funding, residents need continued technical assistance, training and tools so that new activists can begin to acquire key skills for facilitating meetings, designing advocacy campaigns and effectively using data. The ongoing support will also enable the more experienced resident leaders to enhance their skills and knowledge of useful tools and strategies. Local funders can help ensure this access by establishing and institutionalizing a resident leadership training institute, possibly located at a community college.

Resident leaders also need access to peer support groups, which can be organized at the local, regional or national level. These groups are important sources of practical information and advice, reinforcement and mutual support that can help leaders maintain their resilience and optimism as they encounter the inevitable challenges and frustrations in their advocacy efforts. Funders can underwrite the costs of local resident peer support groups (possibly as part of a leadership training institute), and they can assist residents in connecting with regional or national peer support groups by covering their travel expenses.

Build residents' skills to drive change. There are many ways to embed skill-building when thinking about sustainability.

- ◆ **Form resident-led nonprofits or consulting firms to continue the work.** Residents can establish their own

nonprofits or consulting firms to serve as ongoing organizational structures to carry on their resident engagement activities and community improvement efforts. Once established, these organizations can conduct their own fundraising efforts to secure grants or other sources of funding, such as fee-for-service contracts. Such funding can provide the resident-led organizations with greater financial control and an increased ability to direct the engagement activities in ways that they feel are most appropriate.

- ◆ **Improve the fundraising skills of residents.** Funders and technical assistance providers can improve the capacity of resident groups to secure their own ongoing funding by showing them how to:
 - identify grants and other funding opportunities
 - apply for grants and put together funding proposals in response to requests for proposals
 - team up with others in joint funding applications
 - use data to build the case for the proposed activities
 - frame proposals in ways that will be most compelling for the particular funding sources they are approaching (for example, framing the proposed work as an antipoverty effort to appeal to a funder who has that as a key objective for its grant-making)
- ◆ **Improve the grants-management expertise and budgeting skills of resident groups.** In addition to fundraising skills, residents would benefit to learn how grants work and about the administrative capacities (including fiscal and budget controls) that are necessary for sound grants management. When funds are funneled to resident groups through a nonprofit, this knowledge will also allow the residents to be more informed in their business dealings with the organization serving as the fiscal intermediary. That knowledge also can help residents to develop the expertise to someday manage larger grants.

“You need to get those with the funding willing to share the money with residents. [The challenge is] how to do that—to get funding to the residents. [Organizations] take our ideas, but don’t give us the funding; the nonprofits take our programs, but they’re not connected to the communities.

Martha Castilla, San Antonio resident leader
[7/9/15 interview]



The Impact OF RESIDENT ENGAGEMENT AND LEADERSHIP

Earlier in this report (in Section II), we noted that it was important to support resident engagement activities not only because it is the fair and just thing to do but also because it leads to better results for low-income families and communities.

In this section, we highlight examples of the range of outcomes associated with resident engagement activities in the Making Connections sites. These outcomes, summarized in Exhibit A, fall into two broad categories. The first category relates to improved resident engagement and leadership **capacity** that generates more effective resident voice and influence in shaping programs, policies and resources aimed at low-income families and neighborhoods (see Column A in Exhibit A). The second category relates to actual improvements in the lives of low-income individuals, families and neighborhoods that occur as

the result of the increased resident voice and capacity to achieve goals (Column B in Exhibit A).

Our examination of Making Connections also revealed that these outcomes can occur at different levels: on the level of individual residents and their families, at an organizational or institutional level, across a neighborhood or community and at a broader public policy level.

In Exhibit A below, we present brief examples of each type of outcome. While these examples represent only a fraction of the progress associated with resident engagement during Making Connections, they provide concrete illustrations of what can be accomplished by involving residents in community change.

EXHIBIT A. **Overview of Resident Engagement Outcomes**

LEVEL AT WHICH THE OUTCOME OCCURS	OUTCOME TYPE	
	A <i>Improved Resident Engagement and Resident Leadership Capacity and Resident Voice</i>	B <i>Improved Outcomes for Children, Families and Communities as a Result of Resident Engagement</i>
INDIVIDUAL	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Residents develop or enhance their leadership and advocacy skills. Resident leaders move to more powerful positions of influence in the community. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Residents leverage the skills, networks and knowledge they acquired through engagement activities to secure improved employment opportunities. Residents leverage the skills, networks and knowledge they acquired through engagement activities to secure more services or other resources for their families.
ORGANIZATIONAL/ INSTITUTIONAL	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Institutions (such as schools) adopt engagement strategies as part of their standard way of doing business. Resident engagement activities are institutionalized by organizations. Community-based organizations become resident-led in a more intentional way. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Collective resident action supported by community-based organizations results in concrete gains for groups of residents.
NEIGHBORHOOD/ COMMUNITY <small>(Note: This level reflects outcomes focused on specific neighborhoods (place) and programmatic or infrastructure enhancements that generate benefits at a neighborhood level or on a community-wide basis.)</small>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Residents create ongoing mechanisms for mutual support (e.g., neighborhood associations or membership organizations). Other entities across the community deepen or expand resident engagement strategies. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Collective action by residents results in improved services for neighborhoods. Increased/improved services result in better outcomes for children and families at a community or neighborhood level (e.g., improved graduation rates, college admission).
POLICY	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Policymakers and/or funders establish funding pools to support resident engagement activities on a continuing basis. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Policy changes promoted by resident engagement improve conditions for low- and moderate-income families.

Resident Engagement and Leadership Capacity Outcomes

- ◆ **Residents develop or enhance their leadership and advocacy skills.** The resident activists interviewed for this report described how the Making Connections resident engagement activities, and the leadership development training that was provided in concert with those activities, dramatically enhanced their advocacy and leadership capacity. These activities and training efforts increased the residents' facilitation skills, their ability to use data strategically to identify problems and propose solutions, their sense of empowerment and their confidence in dealing with officials and institutions. This in turn allowed them to assume roles as trusted advocates, promotoras, school readiness ambassadors and resident organizing coordinators (ROCs). Through those roles, they were able to conduct outreach to, inform, mobilize and support other residents in efforts to improve conditions and outcomes for their families and neighborhoods.
- ◆ **Resident leaders move to more powerful positions of influence in the community.** In Denver, for example, one resident leader transitioned from receiving public assistance and earning very low wages to eventually being appointed to Denver's Workforce Development Board in the state of Colorado's Economic Development office. She now co-owns a consulting firm that assists community and economic development projects in Latino communities, and she works on an initiative increasing the assets and well-being of Latino older adults in Greater Denver. Another example is in Seattle, where a resident leader has become a member of the Highline School Board and a trustee of Highline Community College, in addition to serving as executive director of the White Center Community Development Association, Inc., which is the organization charged with sustaining the Making Connections-related efforts in that community. And in Louisville, a former public housing resident who became a lead community organizer and integral part of the Making Connections network, left Louisville to serve as director of the Office of Minority Empowerment for the governor of Kentucky.
- ◆ **Institutions adopt engagement strategies as part of their standard way of doing business.** Seattle's Highline School District, in response to resident advocacy, implemented a series of mechanisms to increase parent participation in school-related events to foster greater parent collaboration with teachers and school administrators and to promote more parent involvement in the school committee's decision-making processes.
- ◆ **Resident engagement activities are institutionalized by organizations.** Influenced by the Making Connections experience, Des Moines Area Community College and other local stakeholders established a community leadership certificate program at the college to help individuals involved in community and neighborhood organizations strengthen their leadership skills. The program's short,

affordable classes were developed by the college in partnership with various local organizations and entities. Local public and philanthropic funders provide scholarships for low-income individuals to complete the certificate program.

- ◆ **Community-based organizations become resident-led in a more intentional way.** Local stakeholders in Seattle established White Center Community Development Association, Inc. (WCCDA) as the community-based organization to carry on the Making Connections work following the phasing out of Casey's major funding for the initiative. To ensure that the organization sustained an emphasis on resident engagement and empowerment, a prominent local resident leader was selected in 2012 to serve as WCCDA's executive director, and the organization has emphasized hiring local residents for its other staff positions.
- ◆ **Residents create ongoing mechanisms for mutual support.** Across the Making Connections communities, several mutual support entities were created, such as the Time Dollar programs in a number of sites; Providence's Family, Friends and Neighbors network for home-based child care services; and Louisville's resident membership group, the Network Center for Community Change.
- ◆ **Other entities across the community deepen or expand resident engagement strategies.** Stakeholders in Louisville

“ We developed coffee hours for families to come in and meet [school] staff. [There was] more building of relationships between teachers and parents and building capacity to work together. We also opened up the community budget process around the school budget. We co-hosted a series of budget meetings. We provided translation and transportation; [the meetings] were packed. The parents said it was so nice to come to a meeting where people aren't fighting and to learn how the schools make decisions about how money would be spent We were happy to work with the [school] district. [But] we told them if you want to work with the community... let's change the language we use and have interpreters on hand to explain what it takes to put a budget together and make decisions At the heart [of the process] was how do we build these relationships so people can have real conversations about what we want and where parents can feel safe to ask questions.

Sili Savusa, executive director, White Center CDA, Inc. and resident leader
[6/12/13 interview]

report that, as a direct result of the Making Connections experience over 10 years, there has been a distinct shift in the local social and political culture. For example, there is now an expectation that any community initiative undertaken in the city will include resident engagement activities as a core element.¹⁹

Improved Outcomes for Children, Families and Communities

- ◆ **Individual residents leverage the skills, networks and knowledge they acquired through engagement activities to secure improved employment opportunities.** In San Antonio, for instance, a number of the resident activists used their Making Connections experiences and training to subsequently secure paid promotora positions with local community organizations and new initiatives in the city. Across the Making Connections sites, at least five resident leaders established community-building consulting businesses to improve their incomes while continuing their resident empowerment and neighborhood improvement efforts. These are just a few examples of the ways in which the Making Connections experiences contributed to residents improving their employment and economic status.
- ◆ **Individual residents leverage the skills, networks and knowledge they acquired through their engagement activities to secure increased services or other resources for their families.** Several resident leaders interviewed for this report confided that their initial motivation for engaging in advocacy activities was the desire to access better services and resources for their families, particularly for their children. These leaders reported that, through the skills and contacts they developed during Making Connections, they became much more effective in securing the services and support that their families needed.
- ◆ **Collective resident action supported by community-based organizations results in concrete gains for groups of residents.** In Des Moines, for example, a resident-led advocacy campaign against predatory lending supported by Iowa Citizens for Community Improvement resulted in local families recovering more than \$2.4 million from four predatory lenders.²⁰ In San Antonio, the promotoras' partnership with the Intercultural Development Research Association led to the joint development of a "tekkees" program that conducted outreach and taught computer skills to community residents. According to the resident leader who coordinated the promotoras efforts, all of the teenagers who participated in the program graduated from high school and went on to college.
- ◆ **Collective action by residents results in improved services for neighborhoods.** In Louisville, resident members of the Network Center for Community Change conducted a neighborhood mapping project to identify vacant and abandoned structures and properties needing substantial

rehabilitation. According to the former site coordinator for Making Connections-Louisville, this resident-led project jumpstarted the city government's efforts relative to vacant and abandoned properties and contributed to Louisville's successful application for a Bloomberg Foundation grant for resources to address those properties.

- ◆ **Increased/improved services result in better outcomes for children and families at a community or neighborhood level.** According to a member of the Highline school committee in Seattle, as a result of reforms prompted by parent advocacy (and by two resident leaders being elected to the school committee), the school district saw a reduction in school absences, increased recognition of students of color at graduation, improved high school graduation rates and an increase in students enrolling in college, university and postsecondary technical programs.
- ◆ **Policy changes promoted by resident engagement improve conditions for low- and moderate-income families.** The advocacy campaign undertaken by Des Moines residents helped lead to the Iowa Legislature's passage of an anti-predatory lending "disclosure" law, which reduced the likelihood of families becoming victims. In Denver, in part as a result of resident advocacy over a number of years, the local school committee hired a new superintendent who implemented policy reforms reflecting priorities that had been articulated by parents, including parent-friendly report cards and a new school funding formula that provided more resources to schools whose students had greater needs.²¹





RESIDENT LEADERSHIP AND NETWORKING TRAINING WERE
CONSIDERED THE TWO MOST

meaningful
INVESTMENTS THAT MADE RESIDENTS MORE
effective

MORE SO THAN ANY OTHER EFFORT.

Conclusion



An initial goal of Making Connections was to put residents at the center of neighborhood transformation efforts to improve outcomes for children and families. Much of the early effort was grounded in building trusting relationships and connecting residents to partners and peers across their communities in new and stronger ways. As the sites formed their infrastructure and moved into implementation of innovative strategies and efforts to achieve their core results, they brought residents on board as partners and leaders of various engagement and programmatic strategies. In addition, the Casey Foundation's convening of resident leaders from across the initiative's sites over time helped reinforce the notion that residents were central to the work and had a role to play, locally and nationally, as they influenced the work of Casey itself and helped hold the Foundation accountable for achieving the goals of Making Connections.

However, toward the end of Casey's 10-year investment in Making Connections, and as the sites shifted their focus to how to sustain their efforts after the Foundation's funding ended, the more formal role of residents as leaders and partners in decision-making diminished in many of the sites.

In addition to the lessons reflected earlier in the report, we present two additional recommendations for consideration:

Develop a set of guiding principles for engaging with residents and communities. Although the Casey Foundation did not have one set of principles at the beginning of Making Connections, over time, a series of principles emerged through the Technical Assistance Resource Center and within Casey leadership. Reflecting their learning over time, here are guiding principles that summarize the primary beliefs underlying the Making Connections initiative in terms of work with, and among, residents and other community stakeholders.

- ◆ Relationships need to be based on **mutual respect and equality**, which honors the belief that all partners have something to give and receive.
- ◆ Change efforts should be **co-created** by residents, funders and community partners, and they should be driven by the results they together agree to achieve. Having a shared vision allows everyone to contribute ideas to build toward a successful outcome that is collectively owned.
- ◆ Developing and sustaining neighborhood change takes a long time, and ongoing efforts to involve residents in that change process at multiple levels of leadership are essential. Resident engagement is an **ongoing process** that needs continued attention, support and adequate resources.
- ◆ Residents bring a **diversity of experience** that should be respected and valued. Every person's unique life experience equips him or her with particular knowledge and skills that can enhance any group effort.
- ◆ Change requires **participation from everyone**, including those who are most often overlooked. Even when it may require more time and resources, it is essential to include representation from as many facets of the community as possible (including children and youth, the elderly and individuals of different faiths, abilities and sexual orientations, among others).
- ◆ It is crucial to **meet residents where they are** in terms of knowledge, experience, location and the support needed for participation (including compensation for their time whenever possible). Meaningful resident participation requires logistical support, the identification of trusted and safe spaces to meet, access to information and honest and transparent communication.
- ◆ It is critically important to **build local capacity** that provides individuals with new knowledge and skills that they use on an ongoing basis. Identify ways in which residents and

partners can apply what they are learning and can continue using their new skills and relationships to strengthen their change efforts.

- ◆ A consistent and ongoing **use of data** is needed to help those participating to make informed decisions. Ensure everyone is armed with the same level of information, and promote efforts of residents and other stakeholders to develop a shared understanding of what the data mean.
- ◆ Recognize and respond to **issues of race, class, culture and power**. Be prepared to acknowledge and address the challenges entailed in these issues. Take the time for the hard conversations and active listening that will be necessary to identify appropriate responses.

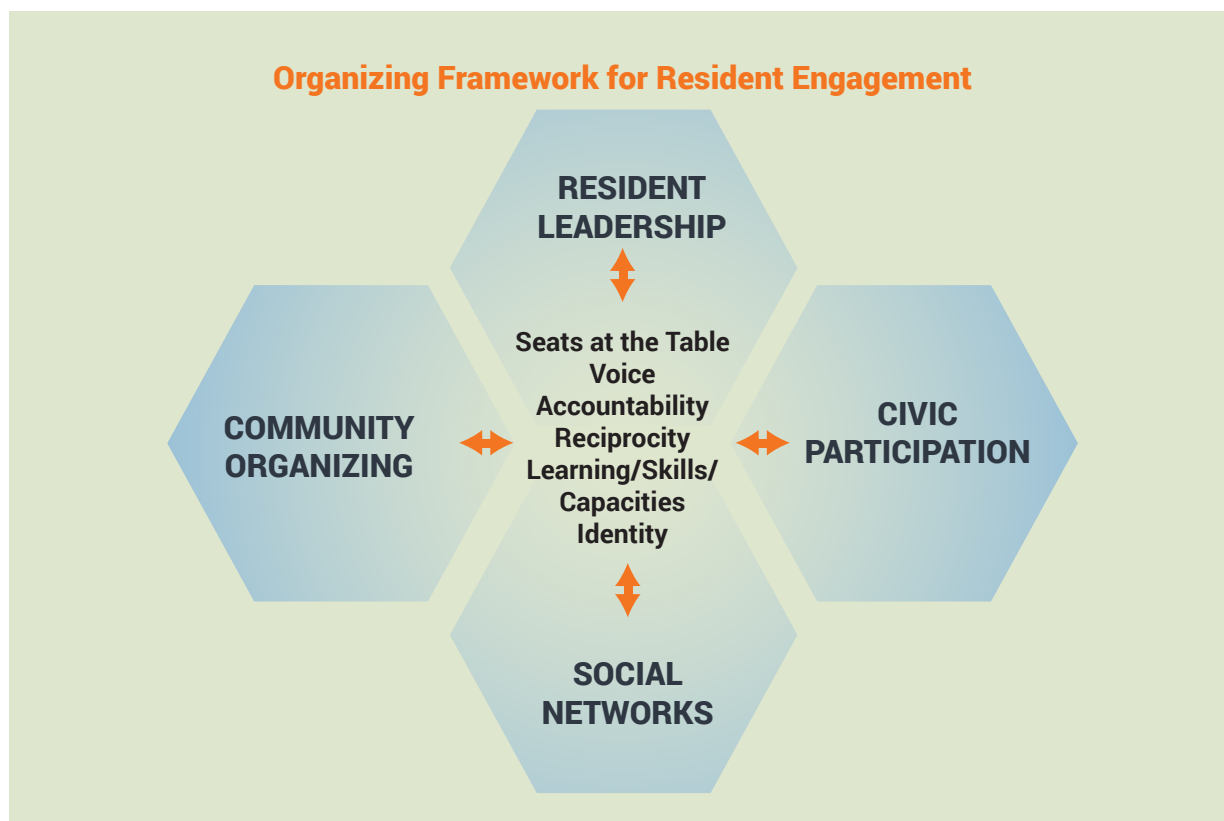
Use an organizing framework for resident engagement activities.

After years of experience in Making Connections, sites' engagement strategies and activities were categorized to create a framework to share with others. The diagram below presents the Foundation's conceptual framework developed in 2007²² to reflect four different groupings of resident engagement activities. While this honeycomb framework was not developed until the later stages of the initiative, it captures the different types of resident engagement activities across sites as a whole up to that point in time. While each type or grouping of resident engagement strategies can be pursued on its own, when combined as part of a comprehensive, integrated approach, the engagement efforts become stronger and mutually reinforcing, thus providing a wider range of opportunities and channels through which residents can shape the future of their neighborhoods.

participation in community forums and design processes, policy advocacy, working through civic organizations or exercising the right to vote.

- ◆ **Social networks:** These strategies and activities focus on building relationships and mutual support between and among residents, yielding a variety of individual, family and community benefits.
- ◆ **Community organizing:** These strategies and activities mobilize community members to take action around achieving better outcomes for their neighborhood, seeking to increase resident voice and influence through the power of numbers when they act together.

Regardless of the specific goals and desired results of any effort focused on community change, neighborhood transformation or a specific population, being clear about the intended role for residents is critically important. Most recent federal and philanthropic initiatives tout resident engagement as a key component of their approaches. However, few move beyond periodic opportunities for resident input to truly emphasize initiative co-design and co-ownership with residents, probably for many reasons. As the Making Connections experience has



- ◆ **Resident leadership:** These strategies and activities train and develop community members to take on leadership roles in the neighborhood improvement processes underway in their community.
- ◆ **Civic participation:** These engagement strategies and activities increase the level at which residents engage in decision-making in their community, including active

shown, engaging residents in meaningful and substantive ways over a significant period of time and moving toward true co-design and shared ownership of the work take considerable time and resources but also reap greater rewards.



Endnotes

1. Annie E. Casey Foundation. (2013). *Community change: Lessons from Making Connections*. Baltimore, MD: Author. Available at <http://www.aecf.org/m/blogdoc/aecf-CommunityChangeLessonsLearnedFromMakingConnections-2013.pdf>.
2. Hebert, S. (2014). *Local voices: On-the-ground perspectives on driving community change in the Making Connections sites*. Baltimore, MD: The Annie E. Casey Foundation. Available at <http://www.communityscience.com/pdfs/aecf-LocalVoices-2014.pdf>.
3. The term “resident” is used throughout this report to encompass those living in a particular geographic area, and includes individuals, families and youth. At the beginning of Making Connections, the Casey Foundation strove to ensure families were at the center. This commitment remained, even as the Foundation began using “resident” as a more inclusive word.
4. Ahsan, N. (2009). *Sustaining neighborhood change: The power of resident leadership, social networks, and community mobilization*. Baltimore, MD: Annie E. Casey Foundation. See “What does Authentic Demand look like?” p. 6.
5. New Futures (1988–1993) was the first of the Foundation’s long-term, multisite initiative to improve educational outcomes for youth in five urban school systems. Family to Family (1992–2006) was a community-based initiative to help public child welfare systems achieve better outcomes for children and families. The Rebuilding Communities Initiative (1994–2001) worked to empower individuals and communities to transform their neighborhoods by building the capacity of local organizations. Plain Talk (1993–1998) was a community-based initiative to help residents create and implement effective strategies to prevent teenage pregnancy.
6. While there were no distinct phases of the initiative during the time of its implementation, it is clear retrospectively that there was a beginning stage of building relationships with communities, a stage of implementing the initiative and focusing on outcomes and a time of focus on sustaining efforts as the initiative neared its end. This is not to imply that work was not going on prior to the Foundation’s investing in this initiative nor that activities ceased when Casey funding did. The stages described here are meant to illustrate the range of resident-engagement activities over a period of time.
7. Annie E. Casey Foundation. (2013), p. 1.
8. Note: the following descriptions of the resident engagement activities during the first phase of Making Connections draw heavily from the resource guide *Residents Engaged in Strengthening Families and Neighborhoods*, available at <http://www.aecf.org/m/resourcedoc/aecf-ResidentsEngagedInStrengthenFamilies-2000.pdf>.
9. For more details see http://www.diaristproject.org/files/EastSide_Cultural_Center_web.pdf.
10. This approach was developed by Edgar Cohn and the organization Time Banks. More information can be found at <http://timebanks.org>.
11. The “Study Circle” concept was developed in 1989 by the Topsfield Foundation, a private nonprofit foundation dedicated to advancing deliberate democracy and improving the quality of public life in the United States.
12. For example, Boston, Denver and Seattle had resident-led small grant programs. For more details on the Boston experience, see www.diaristproject.org/files/Boston_4_28_04.pdf.
13. In addition to the LLP, some Making Connections sites (such as Indianapolis) also created neighborhood learning partnerships for particular neighborhoods. Residents from those neighborhoods represented the majority of the membership of these groups, although local site team members or designated data consultants helped them access, analyze and interpret data.
14. Play & Learn groups were also designed so that parents could strengthen their social connections and mutually support one another and take part in peer learning on positive parenting, while their children engaged in the play activities.
15. The Providence FFN (Friend, Family and Neighbor) network became a vehicle for residents to collectively speak up in one powerful voice about the need to open up child care certification processes to family, friend and neighbor providers, as a way to increase the availability of quality child care options. The group’s advocacy resulted in FFN care networks indeed being able to secure those certifications. The group also advocated for providing a fast-track teacher certification process for individuals who had been professional teachers in other countries.
16. On average, sites had access to a pool of technical assistance resources of close to \$1 million annually. They worked closely with CSSP to request technical assistance that would advance their progress toward a result or capacity.
17. This approach is described in the publication *Help on the Way*, which is available at <http://www.cssp.org/publications/neighborhood-investment/help-on-the-way-communities-getting-the-results-they-want-from-peer-matches.pdf>.
18. Peer matches were a significant technical assistance investment by CSSP and the Casey Foundation. Approximately six to eight matches were conducted each year, at a cost of about \$15,000 each. The results from the well-planned and skillfully facilitated matches led to continued interest in this form of TA within and outside of Making Connections.
19. See Scott Hebert, *Local Voices: On-the-Ground Perspectives on Driving Community Change in the Making Connections Sites*, Annie E. Casey Foundation, 2014.
20. See *Stopping Predatory Lending: How a strategic alliance allowed Citizens for Community Improvement, residents and Des Moines Making Connections to tackle an issue that has undermined many families and neighborhoods*. Available at <http://www.diaristproject.org/files/predatorylending.pdf>.
21. See *Unleashing the power of parents to fix their kids’ schools*. Available at <http://www.diaristproject.org/files/parents.pdf>.
22. <http://www.aecf.org/resources/sustaining-neighborhood-change/>

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