LEARNING FROM A FUNDERS COLLABORATIVE:

The Human Services Strategic Restructuring Pilot Project

Follow-Up Study

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CONTENTS

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

In 2009, eighteen funders in northeast Ohio joined together in the Human Services Strategic Restructuring Pilot Project (the Collaborative) to examine how to support nonprofit organizations in strategic restructurings. Driven by economic forces that had reduced foundation endowments, caused public funding sources to retrench, and placed financial strains on individual donors—all at the same time as the demands on social services agencies to address basic, critical needs rose dramatically—the Collaborative was intended to ensure "that our community's most vulnerable citizens continue to have access to the highest quality human services in a new reality of reduced, fragile resources."

The initiative had two principal goals: (a) education about restructuring and how to support it and (b) support of actual significant, high-level strategic restructuring efforts. Evaluation at the project's conclusion in 2011 showed good attainment of the educational goals and completion of four significant restructuring transactions involving eight nonprofit organizations. A prior case study[1] examined the structure, development, and results of the Collaborative in depth. This report briefly summarizes the prior study, but focuses primarily on updated information about the experiences and perceptions of its participants from the perspective of more than two years after completion of the project.

Looking back, the organizations that completed restructuring strongly confirmed earlier conclusions about the importance in strategic restructuring of relationship building and trust; strong board and executive leadership; thoughtful and thorough negotiations; thorough due diligence; high quality facilitation; and complementary visions and goals. They also identified the following additional commonalities in their restructuring experiences from their perspective in 2013:

- They view their restructuring experiences as successful in that they all have improved financial position and operations, higher visibility, enhanced status, and greater credibility.

- They have become more comfortable with, and are interested in further pursuing, collaborative activity.

- Three of the organizations have experienced changes in the composition of top management teams, highlighting the importance of careful pre-restructuring planning for changes in leadership, as well as the reality that expectations and decisions in that regard may need to be revisited during the implementation phase.

[1] Coquillette, J., Eagan, S., Willen, C. and Yankey, J, "The Human Services Strategic Restructuring Pilot Project: A Journey of Learning" (November 2011). Available at http://foundationcenter.org/gainknowledge/collaboration/restructurepilot/docs/11715_02_SAINTCaseStudy_FinalPrintVersion.pdf

- They required more post-restructuring transition and implementation assistance than anticipated, and post-restructuring support from foundations has been uneven.

- The most significant post-restructuring issues have centered on human resources, organizational rebranding and repositioning, fundraising, cultural integration, and technology.

- They feel that restructuring support from funders is critical and can take a variety of forms.

Participants confirmed earlier views on the primary strengths and weaknesses of the pilot project as a model for supporting strategic restructuring. The strengths include its (a) emphasis on learning, (b) provision of a process and resources to support restructuring transactions, (c) inclusion of careful assessment and feasibility analyses, (d) expert consulting, and (e) provision of an arena in which funders, organizations, and others could work together on a common project. Weaknesses included (a) underestimation of the time, energy, and particularly money required to achieve a successful result, (b) rigid timelines, (c) lack of flexibility in certain other respects, and (d) suboptimal use of the communications firm and the nonprofit leaders advisory group. New insights included the following:

- The model would benefit from the inclusion of clear outcomes measurement criteria.

- The public sector should be represented in human services restructuring initiatives.

- The pilot project model is replicable.

- There is a desire for more follow-up to the Collaborative than has occurred to date.

In reflecting back, the funders involved continued to view the project as a success, although some would like future iterations to be more cost-effective. Participation in the Collaborative has had some, mostly indirect, influence on subsequent funder activity. A majority of funders have made post-Collaborative grants to support collaboration or relevant capacity building. There is broad support among participants in the Collaborative for further funder collaboration in support of strategic restructuring and to address other gaps in capacity in the nonprofit sector.

Additionally, participants recommended that funders:

- Make financial and other support for restructuring a priority.

- Continue to educate their boards and staffs about collaboration.

- Identify ways to help ensure that grantees are able to build the skills, relationships, and resources to work together effectively.

- Create a common proposal format and a system to allow organizations to make one presentation simultaneously to multiple funders.

- Provide flexible, multi-year funding for restructuring.

- Use their reputational capital to attract additional attention and financial support for restructuring.

- Create a system of regular communication about collaboration for the entire community.

- Create funding collaboratives focused on additional nonprofit subsectors.

- Work with others beyond northeast Ohio to expand the scope of education and support for collaborative activity.

Key themes and lessons learned articulated in 2011 and confirmed in 2013 include the following:

Everyone has something to learn. In addition to practical benefits, collaborative activity is frequently educational for funders, nonprofit organizations, consultants, and others. Ongoing knowledge development is of value to the entire community and should be an explicit goal of philanthropic collaboration in support of strategic realignment in the nonprofit sector. Knowledge, once developed, should be shared and applied to support continuous improvement.

Leadership is indispensable. Strong leadership from funders and nonprofit board members and executives is necessary to create change and achieve success. It is not practical to wait for "everyone" to sign on.

Trust makes things happen. Collaboration occurs at the speed of trust. Trust is the glue that holds the process together, and it needs to be created, nurtured, and sustained.

Structure is essential, but one size does not fit all. Collaborative projects need to have enough structure to create common expectations, goals, and standards; provide a roadmap for the work; and provide the tools and resources necessary for success. They also must be sufficiently flexible to accommodate different viewpoints and needs in pursuit of a common purpose.

Doing the deal is one thing; making the deal work is another. "Making the deal work" is real and sometimes messy work, often more complicated and costly than initially expected. Funders and nonprofit organizations should plan for long-term engagement.

The last chapter takes a long time to write. Because organizational restructuring is a complicated process, and organizations and the nonprofit sector are inherently dynamic, successful restructuring requires extended vision and effort. Funders and nonprofits should build in multi-year evaluations and anticipate the use of common standards and tools for outcome assessment currently under development in the field.

Some additional key themes and lessons learned were articulated by participants in the Collaborative (particularly the nonprofit organizations) in 2013:

Working together—albeit challenging—is better than working alone. Issues facing the nonprofit community are difficult and complex; working together leverages human and financial resources, sparks creativity, and allows the problems to be tackled from multiple perspectives.

Collaboration is fundamental to the new normal. In order to reap the very significant benefits of working together, funders and nonprofit organizations must be prepared to change their ways and develop new capacities.

Restructuring is a savvy, strategic option. Successful restructuring can yield many benefits that can help a nonprofit organization to do more and better; there are a host of positive reasons to collaborate. Restructuring need not be perceived as being related to weakness, financial difficulty, or organizational survival but can, in appropriate circumstances where long-term sustainability is likely, help to save valuable services or assets when an organization is struggling.

Form follows function. When considering collaboration, organizations will benefit from, first, considering the nature and degree of integration that will support their service goals—and then using expert advice to help them choose a legal structure that is compatible with those goals.

Collaboration spurs collaboration. The experience of participating in a successful restructuring can inspire and empower organizations to seek additional collaborative opportunities. Similarly, collaboration among funders can stimulate a desire to apply collaborative energy to a host of new domains, whether related to restructuring or focused on other pressing issues.

A spirit of transparency and a commitment to thoughtful, clear, boundary-spanning communication can help to level the power imbalance between grantmakers and grantseekers, ultimately resulting in better outcomes for the community as a whole. Breaking down barriers is not easy, but a genuine exchange of viewpoints and authentic dialogue are key values that can be built on.

INTRODUCTION

OVERVIEW AND SCOPE

In 2009, eighteen funders in northeast Ohio[2] joined together in the Human Services Strategic Restructuring Pilot Project (the Collaborative) to examine how to support nonprofit organizations in strategic restructurings. The project was developed in response to the significant combined effects of recession—retraction in public funding for nonprofits in an economic climate that also reduced foundation endowments, all when the demand for critical basic needs was dramatically escalating. Seeking to ensure "that our community's most vulnerable citizens continue to have access to the highest quality human services in a new reality of reduced, fragile resources," this group of funders chose to focus on human services agencies with a footprint in Cuyahoga County.

The initiative focused primarily on the development of significant, high-level strategic alliances and corporate integration efforts with the potential to increase capacity by reducing duplicative services, increasing sustainability, increasing effectiveness, or producing substantial cost savings. Outcomes sought via the Collaborative were both educational—to help funders learn how to support nonprofit organizations in working together and to expose local nonprofit leaders to the principles and practices of strategic collaboration—and practical—the Collaborative was intended to support development and, in some instances, execution of significant strategic restructuring plans. Early evaluation results showed good achievement of the educational goals. In addition, the Collaborative supported four pairs of organizations in achieving important restructurings.

The structure, development, and results of the Collaborative at the time of its conclusion in April 2011 were examined in depth in a prior case study.[3] During the two-plus years that have followed, funders and nonprofit leaders have carried out their responsibilities under "new normal" conditions including continued reduced public funding for nonprofits and increased stakeholder expectations regarding accountability. Use of strategic restructuring as a tool to increase efficiency, effectiveness, and sustainability continues to attract widespread attention, and funders continue to explore the uses of collaborative effort among themselves to maximize investment impact.

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[2] Abington Foundation; Charter One Foundation; The Cleveland Foundation; Deaconess Community Foundation; Dominion Foundation; Eva L. and Joseph M. Bruening Foundation; Frank Hadley Ginn and Cornelia Root Ginn Charitable Trust; Fred A. Lennon Charitable Trust; The George Gund Foundation; John P. Murphy Foundation; Kulas Foundation; The Reinberger Foundation; The Reuter Foundation; Saint Luke's Foundation; The Thomas H. White Foundation; United Way of Greater Cleveland; Weathertop Foundation; William J. and Dorothy K. O'Neill Foundation.

[3] Coquillette, J., Eagan, S., Willen, C. and Yankey, J, "The Human Services Strategic Restructuring Pilot Project: A Journey of Learning" (November 2011). Available at http://foundationcenter.org/gainknowledge/collaboration/restructurepilot/docs/11715_02_SAINTCaseStudy_FinalPrintVersion.pdf

This report revisits the prior study, briefly describing the participants, process, and initial results of the Collaborative, but focuses primarily on updated information about the experiences and perceptions of its participants from the perspective of more than two years later. It concludes with updates to the key themes and lessons learned. In doing so, this study aims to:

- Continue to educate funders, organizations, and others in the nonprofit community about the processes, benefits, and challenges of nonprofit strategic restructuring.
- Help in the development of plans for funders in the region to continue to move forward in supporting strategic restructuring and collaborative capacity in the nonprofit sector.
- Stimulate additional conversation about the ways in which collaboration among funders and organizations can benefit the nonprofit community and the people it serves.

METHODOLOGY

Original Case Study

The first case study was based on public and private documents and records of the Collaborative (provided by its leadership and other participants) and key informant interviews and independent research conducted by the authors. The documents and records included, among other things, meeting materials, workshop presentations, communications among the funders, communications with the nonprofit community, budgets, contracts, reports and evaluations, restructuring documents, and news releases. The interviewees[4] were identified by the authors. They included (a) the co-chairs of the Collaborative,[5] (b) representatives of fourteen of the other sixteen funders in the Collaborative, (c) one local funder whose organization was invited to participate but did not, (d) the three consultants who worked directly with the nonprofit organizations that participated in the pilot project,[6] (e) several members of a nonprofit advisory group that gave input into the design of the project and assisted with the identification of the consultants, (f) lay and professional leaders of the eight agencies that completed the restructuring process,[7] (g) representatives of three organizations

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[4] A list of all interviewees in the initial study appears in Appendix I.

[5] Deborah Vesy, President and Chief Executive Officer of Deaconess Foundation, and Denise San Antonio Zeman, President and Chief Executive Officer of Saint Luke's Foundation.

[6] Jo DeBolt (La Piana Consulting), David Kantor (Kantor Consulting Group), and Amy Main Morgenstern (Main Stream Enterprises).

[7] Bellflower Center for Prevention of Child Abuse; Centers for Families and Children; Crossroads: Lake County Adolescent Counseling Services, Inc.; Domestic Violence Center; E City (Entrepreneurship: Connecting, Inspiring, and Teaching Youth); New Directions; West Side Ecumenical Ministry; and Youth Opportunities Unlimited.

that provided additional support to the project during its implementation in specific ways,[8] (h) a representative of an additional organization engaged to assist post-implementation with dissemination of information about the Collaborative,[9] and (i) leaders of five funders collaboratives in other cities.[10]

Two-Year Follow-Up Study

In the two-year study, contact with participants in the Collaborative was designed to capture most closely the experience of the four restructured organizations that resulted directly from the Collaborative.[11] This work was completed largely through intensive small-group, in-person interviews for each organization with additional one-on-one telephone and email conversations to clarify and obtain additional information. Due to scheduling challenges, one organization was interviewed solely via individual telephone calls. Interviewees in each organization included the board chair, executive director/president, and key staff members. Questions explored the integration process, outcomes realized by the restructuring, reflections on the structure and implementation of the Collaborative, and the future of collaborative activity in the region. In total, 14 people from the four restructured organizations were interviewed.

Funders involved in the Collaborative also were interviewed, responding to 18 questions forwarded in advance. The questions focused on the funders' views on the Collaborative (specifically in regard to the pilot project's influence on ongoing work), pilot project outcomes, lessons learned, and future outlook for collaborative funding activity. Eleven of the 18 funders were available to be interviewed.

An advisory group of nonprofit leaders was engaged early in the formation of the Collaborative. Three of six members were available to be interviewed about their experience and their impressions of the project's impact.

The three consultants retained to facilitate the restructurings and who themselves worked collaboratively on the project were interviewed about the Collaborative's process, challenges, and impact. The consultants also were also asked for their post-project thoughts on restructurings and the role of grantmakers in strengthening the nonprofit community.

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[8] The Ohio Grantmakers Forum, which acted as convener and provided administrative support during the early part of the Collaborative and acted as fiscal agent throughout; the Center on Urban Poverty & Community Development at Case Western Reserve University's Mandel School of Applied Social Sciences, which formally evaluated the project; and Landau Public Relations, the communications firm retained by the Collaborative.
[9] Foundation Center – Cleveland.
[10] Nonprofit Alliances Support Program (Dayton, Ohio); Strategic Alliance Partnership (Toledo, Ohio); Catalyst Fund for Nonprofits (Boston, Massachusetts); Community Catalyst Fund (Charlotte-Mecklenburg, North Carolina); and Maine Nonprofit Viability Program (Maine).
[11] Domestic Violence & Child Advocacy Center; The Centers for Families and Children; Crossroads: Lake County Adolescent Counseling Services, Inc. and New Directions; Youth Opportunities Unlimited.

A complete list of participants interviewed in the follow-up study appears in Appendix II.[12]

THE TERM "RESTRUCTURING"

Although collaborative interactions among nonprofit organizations take many forms ranging in the degree to which the organizations interrelate, the term "restructuring" was used in the Collaborative and is used in this study to refer to the more significant, high-level types of organizational arrangements through which there is a change in the locus of control. Although the funders who supported the Collaborative were interested in a broad definition of "collaboration" that would encompass the entire continuum of possibilities, it was their primary intent that participating organizations would give careful consideration to the creation of relationships involving more substantial forms of partnering, including formal strategic alliances and transactions involving corporate integration.

[12] Participants in the introductory workshop for the Collaborative (but who were not among the eight organizations that completed the process) also were contacted by email and asked to complete an 18-22 question survey. The questions focused on the status of restructuring activity in their respective organizations and the influence their participation in the pilot project has had on activities since that time. The survey link was sent to 116 individuals, but only 32 individuals responded and many questions were skipped, rendering the results statistically invalid and the results inconclusive.

THE PILOT PROJECT AND RESULTS TO DATE

FORMATION OF THE COLLABORATIVE AND PROJECT IMPLEMENTATION

A variety of factors combined to trigger the formation of the Collaborative, most of all the recession that began in 2007 and the resulting financial stresses on nonprofit organizations, public funders, and foundation endowments, all at a time when demand for human services was escalating. In addition, a changing policy environment in Ohio caused many nonprofits and their funders to consider the advantages of greater scale and scope. In a broader sense, a tradition of collegial relationships among northeast Ohio's many grantmaking organizations, the presence of common forums in which funders shared ideas, and prior experiences in pooled funding created an environment supportive of a collaborative initiative.

In early 2009, leaders in the Cleveland-area nonprofit community initiated a conversation that quickly led to background research and formulation of a concept paper and timeline for a pilot funders collaborative to encourage and foster significant nonprofit restructurings among human services organizations in Cuyahoga County. The funders determined to limit the project to human services agencies because they felt this was an area of common interest and, during the recession, an area where needs were most pressing. Although the funders were interested in collaboration as broadly defined, for purposes of the pilot project they were particularly interested in strategic restructuring efforts with the potential to increase capacity in the local human services infrastructure.

The concept paper called for a pilot project, to be shaped by both funders and their nonprofit constituents, with dual goals—both educational (for funders and nonprofit organizations) and practical (it was hoped that the project would support a number of concrete transactions). In a matter of months, eighteen funders (including all of the largest funders in the region) signed on and funds were raised (approximately $400,000). An advisory group of nonprofit leaders was formed; three independent consultants were retained to facilitate the project; evaluators and communications professionals were engaged; and the program model was refined.

The Collaborative was implemented in three phases:

Phase I – Education Workshops (December 2009)

In November 2009, funders in the Collaborative invited 81 nonprofit human services organizations in Cuyahoga County to attend one of two four-hour educational workshops to learn about the pilot project. The invitation list, which had been generated by the funders, included grantees as well as other organizations for which the funders thought this opportunity might be of interest. While some of the invited organizations had operations in other counties as well, having a presence within Cuyahoga County was a prerequisite for invitation to the workshops. The invitation explicitly stated that attendance was strictly voluntary; however, organizations desiring to attend were required to be represented by both the chief executive officer and the board chair, and no substitutions were permitted.

Seventy-six of the 81 invited organizations sent representatives, with a total of 151 people participating in one of the two workshops. The workshops were led by the three-person consulting team, and no funders were present except during the welcome receptions. This was intended to encourage open and honest discussion. At each of the workshops, the consulting team gave a presentation to acquaint attendees with the Collaborative, the different forms of collaboration available to nonprofits, and other information about strategic restructuring.

Following the workshops, attendees received a letter thanking them for their participation and providing them with a series of follow-up documents including an Internal Self-Assessment Worksheet to help guide discussions concerning the agency's readiness to proceed to the second phase of the Collaborative. The agencies were requested to return an Intent to Proceed Memorandum conveying interest—or lack thereof—in proceeding to Phase II.

Phase II – Readiness Assessment (January 2010 – May 2010)

Forty-three of the 76 nonprofit organizations represented at the Phase I workshops formally signified their interest in proceeding to Phase II. The consulting team reviewed the Intent to Proceed forms, conducted individual telephone interviews with each agency's chief executive officer, requested input on the agencies from the funders, and developed recommendations as to which agencies should proceed. Selection criteria included (a) clear articulation by the agency of its motivation for pursuing strategic restructuring and the benefits to be achieved, (b) evidence of alignment of the motivation and benefits, (c) other preliminary evidence of organizational readiness, and (d) evidence that the proposed restructuring would be in alignment with the goals of the Collaborative.

After additional discussion and input from the funders, 17 of the 43 interested agencies were selected to go on and the Collaborative issued formal invitations. Four of the organizations invited had not been present at the Phase I workshops, but were invited to participate because they had been identified as potential partners by organizations that had attended the workshops and been selected to move on to Phase II.

During Phase II, the 17 organizations were grouped into seven clusters of two or more. The readiness assessment process continued, focusing on exploring restructuring opportunities within the cluster of organizations. Each agency was assigned a consultant with whom to work during the phase. Each agency (a) completed a self assessment and a financial position assessment; (b) provided financial, corporate, program, board, and staffing information; and (c) completed with the assigned consultant a several-hour in-person interview involving board and staff. The resulting report prepared by the consultant was reviewed by the organization for accuracy, and additional telephone or in-person meetings were conducted as needed to update or share additional information.

Phase III – Restructuring Plan Formulation (June 2010 – November 2010)

Based on the consultants' reports and additional discussion, the funders invited five of the seven clusters—involving 11 of the 17 organizations that had completed Phase II—to progress to the third and final stage of the pilot project during which the final groupings of agencies would develop their restructuring plans around a specific high-level collaboration option. One of the five clusters chose to self-select out of the Collaborative because of the departure of a key executive. A total of eight nonprofits—four clusters, each comprised of two organizations—agreed to continue.

At this point, a joint negotiating team involving board and staff was identified for each of the four clusters. A two-person consulting team was assigned to work with each cluster. Each pair of organizations was guided through a process to determine shared outcomes; negotiate the elements of an agreement regarding governance, leadership, program, administrative functions, and budget; conduct due diligence; and take legal steps to restructuring.

RESTRUCTURING RESULTS

Significant restructuring outcomes were achieved by all four clusters that completed the process, and they promptly thereafter began the post-restructuring steps critical to achieving their goals. A report on each of the four clusters follows, with special emphasis on ongoing restructuring progress and results from the perspective of two years later.

A study by MAP for Nonprofits[13] has identified the following outcomes as key indicators of success for merged organizations:

- Improved image, reputation, or public support
- Improved, expanded, or preserved services
- Increased quality of operations
- Increased efficiency of operations
- Improved financial stability
- Development of a positive organizational culture

[13] MAP for Nonprofits, "Success Factors in Nonprofit Mergers" (July 2012). Available at http://www.mapfornonprofits.org/vertical/sites/%7B876C4FB8-E997-480F-BF5B-AFAA0F113D9D%7D/uploads/SuccessFactorsReportFINAL7_23.pdf

These outcomes were used as a framework for reviewing the experience of the restructured organizations resulting from the Collaborative, together with the goals articulated by the organizations and the Collaborative pre-restructuring. Because the organizations were asked only retrospectively to analyze their outcomes in these terms, complete information was not available in all areas (for example, the organizations often did not distinguish between increased *quality* and increased *efficiency* of operations). In addition, interviews took place approximately two and a half years post-restructuring, and it is becoming clear in the literature that actual results from a restructuring may not be known for several years, and analyses undertaken in the first 24 months or so may be distorted by the financial and other impacts of the restructuring transaction itself.[14] Additional follow-up in the future will be beneficial in order to accurately assess long-term outcomes for these organizations.

BELLFLOWER CENTER FOR PREVENTION OF CHILD ABUSE AND DOMESTIC VIOLENCE CENTER

Results at the Pilot Project's Conclusion in 2011

Bellflower Center for Prevention of Child Abuse (Bellflower), with a pre-restructuring annual operating budget of approximately $1 million, engaged in clinical treatment and education to address child abuse and neglect. The Domestic Violence Center (DVC) had an annual operating budget of approximately $2.5 million and provided education and advocacy on domestic violence as well as direct service to domestic violence victims. In restructuring, these organizations sought to create (a) a continuum of services to break the cycle of relationship abuse including prevention, intervention, advocacy, and leadership; (b) a new organizational model for addressing abuse that could be replicated; (c) a more balanced and diversified financial position; and (4) operating efficiencies.

The restructuring transaction resulted in a new organization using the name Domestic Violence and Child Advocacy Center. Although the restructured arrangement was referred to by the parties as a merger ("a merger of strength"), legally a parent-subsidiary relationship was created in which DVC was the parent organization. It was intended that both 501(c)(3) corporations would be maintained at least for a period of time due to accreditation requirements and contractual obligations, but all operations were to be combined.

Following the transaction, all pre-restructuring services continued, and the parties expected an increase in services. The organization began to combine administrative operations and facilities, anticipating an increase in the number and geographic range of locations available to clients.

[14] MergeMinnesota, "Nonprofit merger as an opportunity for survival and growth" (2009). Available at http://www.mapfornonprofits.org/wp-content/uploads/2013/10/MergeMinnesota.pdf

The board of the newly combined organization included approximately equal numbers of members from the Bellflower and DVC boards. The President-elect of Bellflower's board became President of the new board.

The executive staffs were combined. The Executive Director of DVC became the CEO of the combined organization. The Executive Director of Bellflower became the COO. The remainder of the two staffs combined easily with no change in staffing levels.

Restructuring Results as Viewed Two Years Later in 2013

The newly-named Domestic Violence & Child Advocacy Center (DVCAC) is no longer structured in parent-subsidiary form and is now one, fully merged 501(c)(3) registered under the new name. It has achieved its goal to devise a new organizational model providing a continuum of services to break the cycle of relationship abuse, including prevention, intervention, advocacy, and leadership. Its new mission is "to empower individuals, educate the community and advocate for justice to end domestic violence and child abuse." The restructured organization "envisions a community in which all people enjoy lives free from violence and abuse and feel safe and secure in their relationships."[15]

DVCAC has received national recognition for combining services related to domestic violence and child abuse. As the pivot point on the subject of abuse in Cuyahoga County, DVCAC now has more leverage with the County's Department of Children and Family Services and new credibility when talking with civic leaders about establishing a Children's Advocacy Center that would fill a long-identified gap in children's services in the region.

The board has not changed significantly in the past two years and continues to have approximately equal representation from each of the two merged organizations. Board committees have been slightly restructured, and the need for a human resources committee has been identified (DVCAC now has 65+ staff members).

Post-restructuring program changes have been few and are primarily the result of staff changes related to funding, not the merger. Since FY2010, DVCAC has realized net growth in the number of clients served through Justice System Advocacy (+8%), Counseling (+13%), and Supervised Visitation Center (+20%) programs. The number of teens who participated in dating education presentations surged when funding was made available for this purpose in FY2011 and FY2012. The number of teens reached dropped as expected when funding was terminated, but the total number of teens engaged annually remains up over 20% from the pre-restructuring timeframe.

The post-restructuring CEO remains as the organization's leader. The COO, who was responsible for and completed the accreditation aspects of the merger, continued with the organization

[15] Domestic Violence & Child Advocacy Center website: http://www.dvcac.org/

until August 2013. The resources required to support both the CEO and COO salaries have been a point of regular review since the restructuring, and, with the restructuring transition complete, the COO position was eliminated in the FY2014 budget. Current staff includes 17 former Bellflower employees who are primarily counselors and 50 staff members from DVC.

One of two administrative offices has been closed due to a lease issue unrelated to the restructuring, and its functions have moved to the remaining office. DVCAC has added two more service sites on the west side of Cleveland (offices and a group room in a church to serve the local Latina population and a center in another church with counseling, parenting, and domestic violence education programming). DVCAC now has 55 different service locations on both the east and west sides of Cleveland. DVCAC is looking for a central location to better serve the many clients who often need assistance from multiple DVCAC departments.

Technology integration for both finance and donor-tracking systems worked smoothly early in the merger. Since that time, the need for a total computer system upgrade has been identified. A funding request has been submitted to establish a single server system (vs. the current two) that will significantly improve communication and efficiency and also contribute substantially to cultural integration.

The restructured organization has realized financial efficiencies largely due to cost avoidance. Cost reductions have been achieved through the elimination of the COO position; health insurance rate savings; incremental savings on copiers, postage meters, and other equipment; and combined staff trainings. DVCAC also has realized unanticipated savings related to using one shared administrative office space, benefiting from lower expenditures for rent, utilities, and mileage.

Fifty percent of DVCAC revenue is government-funded. Significant reductions in such funding, along with shifts in foundation funding priorities, forced DVCAC to make $200,000 in staffing cuts to stay in the black in FY2013, and the staff that remains will realize four paycheck reductions in the coming year. The current agency budget stands at $3.3 million.

With regard to fund development, the merged organization realized a 27% drop in individual donations the first year after donor solicitation lists were combined. Bellflower donors who did not recognize DVCAC as the former Bellflower organization did not respond as expected to the annual appeal for support for child abuse services. In response, DVCAC used the restructuring as a reason to schedule meetings with all major donors. These meetings, during which the motivation for and status of the agency restructuring were reviewed, charted a course for subsequent steady growth in contributions from individual donors. DVCAC is on target to reach a FY2014 goal that is 65% higher than FY2011 individual giving levels. The rise in individual giving vis-à-vis reductions in government funding represents more balanced and diversified funding, especially as compared to DVC's pre-restructuring budget in which there was a substantially higher percentage of government funding.

DVCAC leadership met with foundations prior to the merger to ensure successfully that funding was not reduced. These sessions provided DVCAC with the opportunity to review the anticipated outcomes of the merger and secure continued support for the mission and activities of the newly restructured organization. DVCAC's transition budget was $195,766. The Gund, Deaconess, and Reinberger Foundations provided funding support for cross-training; CARF, Medicaid, and other accreditations; moving expenses; the COO position; limited technology assistance; and legal/due diligence counsel. Various corporations assisted with in-kind donations for due diligence and rebranding efforts.

In addition to formal program evaluations, DVCAC measures its restructuring success by staff comments and their interest in professional development. DVCAC leadership reports that the restructuring caused staff to examine every aspect of the organization and raise the bar to ensure strong outcomes. The organization looks to national models for best practices and new treatment modalities and finds that it is, itself, held up as a national model specifically for the integration of the children's program and domestic violence programming which empowers adult victims. Counselors have been trained in trauma-focused cognitive behavioral therapy for children and will be receiving EMDR training for trauma treatment. Currently, staff is researching the best methods to incorporate pet therapy.

The integration of organizational cultures continues and has been facilitated by extensive cross-training among staff and volunteers. Early trust issues raised by distinct agency orientations (with DVC being adult-oriented and primarily focused on women's empowerment and Bellflower being child-oriented and primarily focused on child safety) were addressed initially in half-day sessions that helped to develop common language and perspectives. Finding common ground among employees has been critical to building trust. Team-building retreats and a facilitated lesson on "Gains and Losses" have been particularly helpful in that regard.

Looking back, DVCAC identifies three major challenges relating to the restructuring:

First, the rebranding caused the loss of identity for both organizations and has had a significant negative impact on cultural integration and community recognition. The organization took advantage of available but limited resources to brand the new organization with a new name and logo. Requests for foundation support to establish a new comprehensive website and to cover significant printing costs for agency collateral materials were not funded. These unexpected expenses had a significant negative impact on both the bottom line and morale during the critical implementation phase. The name change also is believed to have negatively impacted the agency's United Way designated funding stream. DVCAC believes that organizations that anticipate a name change need comprehensive professional rebranding assistance to mitigate the potential negative impact on cultural integration and community recognition.

Second, the smaller of the organizations needed special attention. DVC was the larger organization in terms of budget and employees, and its systems and practices dominated through the integration phase; Bellflower employees had to absorb the most change and benefited from extra support.

Third, issues related to staff represented the greatest restructuring challenge, i.e., staff buy-in, staff reductions, and staff changes. Cultural integration and government funding changes and reductions created an environment of uncertainty for employees and, as a result, leadership delayed making critical staffing adjustments, which only added to morale issues. In retrospect, acting sooner rather than later on staffing decisions would have been better for the organization.

THE CENTER FOR FAMILIES AND CHILDREN AND WEST SIDE ECUMENICAL MINISTRY

Results at the Pilot Project's Conclusion in 2011

The Center for Families and Children (CFC) provided early learning services (preschool/child care/comprehensive wraparound services), behavioral health for children and adults, youth development, and parent and family services, operating on an approximate $23 million annual budget. West Side Ecumenical Ministry (WSEM), with an approximate $9 million annual operating budget, offered early learning services (preschool/child care/comprehensive wraparound services), behavioral health services, food centers, and workforce development. WSEM was a faith-based organization; CFC was not. Through restructuring into one organization, the two sought (1) greater size and scale, especially for early childhood education and to support infrastructure development for all administrative functions; (2) enhanced quality and range of services provided; (3) expanded geographic footprint; (4) operating efficiencies; and (5) improvement in the organization's position for future growth and to foster innovation.

The affiliation agreement for CFC and WSEM created a parent-subsidiary relationship in which CFC, as the parent corporation, became the sole member of WSEM. WSEM, the subsidiary corporation, was the sole member of El Barrio, another organization with which it merged in 2004. This structure was dictated by contractual obligations and credentialing issues, but it was intended that the organizations would be fully integrated over time. Each organization retained its name for the time being pursuant to a transitional brand strategy.

Following the transaction the organization continued to assess all programs for potential integration, focusing first on early learning where both CFC and WSEM had similar, high-quality, complementary programs. Programs without comparable counterparts, such as WSEM's food centers, were expected to continue. The former CFC headquarters became the primary headquarters of the combined organization. All program staff remained at their pre-restructuring locations.

The two boards were combined by selecting 22 WSEM members and 32 CFC members (using an agreed-upon process) and adding some additional new members. It was anticipated that this very large board would be reduced over time. WSEM and El Barrio each had small boards appointed by the parent corporation.

The executive teams were combined. The President and CEO of CFC continued as President and CEO of the combined organization. WSEM's pre-restructuring CEO became Executive Vice President, leading a variety of strategic initiatives for the combined organization. The two staffs were combined as well, with no immediate impact on staffing levels. Eligible WSEM employees, previously non-unionized, were to become members of CFC's union as of January 1, 2012.

Restructuring Results as Viewed Two Years Later in 2013

The parent–subsidiary relationship between CFC and WSEM remains in place. WSEM, the subsidiary organization, remains the sole member of El Barrio. There are no plans to change this corporate structure, but a new corporate brand was launched in September 2013. The restructured organization is now called "The Centers," with a single multi-colored graphic logo.

The board currently has 38 members, the planned post-restructuring reduction achieved through attrition of members who expressed interest in rotating off the board. Membership has been strengthened by increasing corporate representation. Two additional members will be added to achieve the membership size and composition deemed appropriate for maximum board performance. Representation on the board remains approximately the same—60% previously with CFC and 40% previously with WSEM. While many board committees are still co-chaired by former CFC and WSEM representatives, it is expected that single committee chairs will be named as terms come to an end. Board activity is now being strongly focused on strategic thinking and acquiring needed resources.

The executive team created at the time of the restructuring remains in place. A key addition is The Centers' Chief Operating Officer, who previously served as an integration consultant to the restructured organization.

Current board and staff leadership perceive the restructuring to have strengthened The Centers' image and reputation. The organization is viewed as providing an excellent example of successful restructuring where significant organizational culture differences existed. These differences—faith-based and not-faith-based, smaller and larger, non-union and union—presented significant challenges requiring much sensitive attention. There continues to be a high degree of sensitivity about and attention to the pre-restructured organizations' different backgrounds and histories. The Centers' leadership also takes pride in the restructuring as one illustrating that long-held views about the different perspectives on the east and west sides of Cleveland and Cuyahoga County can be successfully addressed. One exception to this view may exist among those long associated with the food centers, in which the ministry mission of WSEM has a long and highly valued history. However, the bottom line for organizational leaders is that together CFC and WSEM are a much stronger organization than either could be separately. They perceive The Centers as having increased leverage in influencing human services policy-making and funding from philanthropic, corporate, and public sources.

The programs and services offered by CFC and WSEM have been retained. An important expansion to the restructured organization's programming has resulted from The Centers being selected as a Head Start grantee in 2013. This is a very significant organizational expansion of early learning programming made possible by the restructuring which underscored for leadership the power of collaboration. The

Centers established a five-member coalition of Head Start providers that includes, along with CFC and WSEM, Cleveland Metropolitan School District, Catholic Charities, and OhioGuidestone. Now, as a Head Start pass-through organization responsible for coordinating activity among partners, The Centers believes higher quality services will be available to Cuyahoga County residents. While there has been no significant expansion of the geographic footprint, this Head Start coalition effort has leadership considering the potential of a regional service role.

The Centers has achieved operational efficiencies, increased effectiveness, and some cost avoidance. All operational aspects of CFC and WSEM were reviewed to determine what practices and procedures would maximize efficiency and effectiveness. The best practices from each organization were used to develop and refine single systems for all aspects of The Centers' operations. This exercise raised the bar in terms of organizational excellence and opened minds for future problem-solving efforts.

Prior to restructuring, WSEM could not afford the infrastructure provided by The Centers that offers expertise at all levels of the organization. Restructuring has provided excellent resources for all operational issues throughout the organization, which has made for significantly improved operations and service delivery. Equally important to effectiveness, employees are now being provided opportunities to achieve their full knowledge and skills potential in the restructured organization.
In addition, the resources of the larger organization have expanded the amount of time WSEM leadership can direct to strategic and high-level operational issues.

The combined organization is more financially stable. WSEM, which was functioning with very limited resources, is a more viable organization post-restructuring. While a small number of WSEM's individual donors have chosen not to support The Centers financially, new donors are being identified and cultivated. The Centers also is enjoying increased success in attracting corporate and foundation support.

There were three major challenges in making the deal work. The first of these, referenced above, related to the integration of quite different organizational histories and cultures. The restructuring process included a series of Friday fact-finding sessions engaging the board's Integration Committee Chair (now board chair) and the CEOs from CFC and WSEM. These sessions provided an opportunity for all three to deepen their knowledge of both organizations, identify restructuring issues, and, most importantly, create a safe environment in which trust could be developed and nurtured. These sessions led to the development of shared organizational values that were reflected in addressing other significant restructuring challenges.

The second major challenge related to staffing and human resources integration. Most staff integration issues impacted WSEM personnel much more than CFC employees. Exacerbating the situation at the outset was the fact that WSEM leadership had already determined—to protect its financial viability regardless of any restructuring activity—that the organization needed to reduce its benefits structure. Unfortunately, the benefit renewal deadline coincided with restructuring implementation, and many of the affected employees initially perceived the change to be a direct result of the restructuring. Fortunately, layoffs were not a major factor in this restructuring process. Only a minimal reduction in staff occurred, and it was dealt with in a "gentle, humane manner," reflecting shared values that had been agreed upon in the series of Friday meetings. As anticipated, WSEM employees joined the CFC union in January 2012.

Key to working through these human resources integration challenge were multiple joint presentations, educational opportunities, and retreats, along with a consultant who supported senior leadership in building trust and confidence in the process. These activities helped to invigorate the work environment. Without question—as viewed by The Centers' leadership team—the use of this consultant proved to be of critical value in the ultimately successful integration process. The consultant was so valuable she was asked to join the organization as the Chief Operating Officer, a position she currently holds.

A third challenge related to technology integration. Interestingly, WSEM's technological capabilities at the time the restructuring agreement was reached were greater than those of CFC. System differences hampered some of the analysis of financial data and slowed the rapid integration of the different technology systems. In-depth review of the entire information technology system is now underway, with the goal to produce a technology enhancement plan aimed at achieving corporate-wide improvement.

This successful strategic restructuring—like most strategic collaborations—required significant amounts of time and money. In addition to funds provided by the Collaborative for educational workshops, organizational assessments, and process facilitation, costs included legal due diligence, financial due diligence, real estate appraisals and assessments, moving people and equipment, human resource adjustments, staff retreats, and consultant fees, including rebranding consulting. Pre-affiliation expenses totaled $320K while post-affiliation expenses came to $405K for an overall total of $725K. Funding in the amount of $310,000 was secured from the foundation community (primarily Saint Luke's Foundation and The Cleveland Foundation) for consultant services and legal and financial due diligence to offset these costs. Nearly $200,000 was brought to the restructuring process by the respective organizations and the remaining costs were absorbed by the restructured organization.

E CITY AND YOUTH OPPORTUNITIES UNLIMITED

Results at the Pilot Project's Conclusion in 2011

Pre-restructuring, E City (E City) had an annual operating budget of approximately $700,000 and offered entrepreneurship programs for urban youth. Youth Opportunities Unlimited (Y.O.U.), with an annual operating budget of approximately $5 million, provided youth workforce development for urban teens, focusing on programs that develop life skills, academic success, and employability. In combining, the two organizations sought (a) broader scope of service to clients; (b) operating efficiencies; and (c) a broader donor base.

Through the Collaborative, a merger was completed with Y.O.U. as the surviving entity. The E CITY corporation was dissolved, and its name was retained as a program of Y.O.U. Of the $700,000 that E City brought over, $200,000 was restricted for an endowment to be used for scholarships or awards for youth who want to study entrepreneurship in college.

Following the transaction, all pre-restructuring programs continued. E City's programs became program areas in the Y.O.U. organization. Program expansion was expected. E City's administration and operations were relocated to Y.O.U.'s headquarters.

The two boards were combined. The chair of the former Y.O.U. board chaired the post-merger board, and the chair of the former E City board became vice chair.

The President of Y.O.U. continued as President of the merged organization. E City's CEO became the senior development executive for Y.O.U. but resigned shortly after the restructuring. Y.O.U. staff took over coordination of E City's programs, and it was intended that E City's substantial volunteer base would be integrated into Y.O.U.

Restructuring Results as Viewed Two Years Later in 2013

Despite several challenges, Y.O.U.'s leadership considers its merger with E City to be successful. Leaders of the merged organization perceive it to be well managed and a model for providing youth services. Brand recognition is stronger, and the merged organization is viewed by many funders as substantially stronger than either pre-restructuring organization was separately.

Much attention during the pilot project (approximately 55% of consultants' activity) was given to board and governance matters. As a result, Y.O.U.'s combined board is considered one of the most positive outcomes of the restructuring and is perceived by Y.O.U.'s leadership to be very strong, highly engaged, and more diverse than prior to the merger. Board size increased from 28 to 37, with nearly half of the current board having previously been on E City's board. Today, approximately one-third of the board has an E City affiliation. The current board has 10 new members who came with no previous affiliation with Y.O.U. or E City.

The overall impact on programs and services resulting from the merger has been positive. Y.O.U. has four “impact” programs that serve 700 students during the school year. While shortly following the merger there was a disappointing drop-off in clientele, the current enrollment level reflects a post-merger addition of 85 youths served at a lower per hour cost. This increase in clients is particularly significant because the number of schools served by E City programming has dropped from six to four due to scheduling constraints imposed by the schools. The merged programs have been strengthened by better flexibility in program design, teacher selection, and outcomes measurement. There has been little increase in the geographic reach of the merged organization, but this was not one of the goals of the restructuring.

Y.O.U. has experienced added value through the addition of the entrepreneurial programming absorbed from E City, which has added to Y.O.U.’s “tool box.” The former E City summer boot camp has been dropped as a result of changes in government funding and a decision by Y.O.U. that there is a greater need for summer jobs programs for youth; Y.O.U. currently is serving 3,000 youth in its summer jobs program.

In operations, the merged organization experienced significant challenges in the technology area. As viewed by Y.O.U.’s current leadership, there was a “big dump” which created a “real mess” to be addressed. Following the decision to merge, approximately 25% of the time of an information technology position was allocated to the task of creating workable, integrated donor and volunteer databases. Although progress was made, this task practically required starting anew in their development. Currently, Y.O.U. is engaged in an Edna McConnell Clark Foundation-funded project in which two paid staff members are involved in building databases and incorporating appropriate outcome measurements. The inclusion in this project is of enormous benefit to Y.O.U. in addressing its after-merger technology challenges.

The major human resources impact for the merged organization occurred in the area of volunteers. When the transfer of the E City Volunteer Coordinator did not work as anticipated, there was a substantial loss both of volunteers and institutional knowledge. Y.O.U. had little previous experience in recruiting for and administering a volunteer program, and the volunteer database was not well developed. The majority of previous E City volunteers chose not to continue their volunteer activity with the merged organization; an estimated 75 volunteers were lost. Two years hence, significant progress is being made under the leadership of the current Volunteer Coordinator. Currently, Y.O.U. owns a robust volunteer database that monitors the activities of 320 volunteers, including 56 who are dedicated to the E City in-school program.

The merged organization has realized an estimated $150,000 in annual cost savings related to the elimination of the E City CEO salary and reduced overhead due to a single system operation, which significantly enhanced efficiencies in areas such as computer systems, databases, payroll, and office equipment.

The merger has impacted Y.O.U.'s fundraising both positively and negatively. Positive outcomes include (a) strengthened brand recognition with both individual and corporate donors, (b) higher credibility and prestige with potential donors, and (c) re-energized foundation funding. Y.O.U. is perceived as having a "new story to tell," which is considered by organizational leadership to be a significant strength. Major disappointment occurred in the early stages of the merger when there was little increase in the donor base as many E City donors chose not to support the newly merged organization. Contributing to this challenge was an E City donor database that was not well maintained and lacking a systematic listing of donors and information regarding prior cultivation activities. The estimated $50,000 growth in E City program support since 2011 has resulted primarily from the identification and cultivation of new donors.

While organizational culture integration has been relatively smooth, a major problem occurred when the plans for E City staff to become the Volunteer Coordinator and Senior Development Officer in the merged organization did not work out as anticipated. Both of these positions have been filled by new personnel who are functioning very well in these roles. This experience taught Y.O.U. leadership that more attention should have been given to the clarification of expectations for these positions prior to the merger being finalized.

Given the growth and learning by the organization in this restructuring, there is interest, even eagerness, for the organization to pursue additional restructuring opportunities.

As noted above, the most challenging issues confronting Y.O.U. in its restructuring process have been the loss of institutional knowledge from E City and the initial loss of E City key donors, sponsors, and volunteers. In addition, Y.O.U. has found it challenging to address gaps in available resources for improving E City's donor database, technology development and integration, and legal assistance.

NEW DIRECTIONS AND CROSSROADS: LAKE COUNTY ADOLESCENT COUNSELING SERVICES

Results at the Pilot Project's Conclusion in 2011

New Directions, with an annual operating budget of approximately $4 million, operated pre-restructuring primarily in Cuyahoga County and provided treatment services to chemically-dependent adolescents and their families. Crossroads: Lake County Adolescent Counseling Services, Inc. (Crossroads) was a provider of mental health services for children and adolescents and their families, along with early childhood services, primarily in Lake County; it had an annual operating budget of approximately $6 million. The two organizations sought affiliation for purposes of (a) growth—to improve access to, and quality of, services and remain competitive; (b) increased scale and capacity to recruit and retain quality staff; (c) expansion of geographic reach; and (d) operating efficiencies, especially in back office operations, information technology, and human resources.

Participation in the Collaborative resulted in a restructuring in which each organization retained its independent 501(c)(3) status, but the two separate corporations were bound together by an affiliation agreement, governed by a common board of directors and identical by-laws, and operated by a common senior management team. The two organizations continued to use their separate names because of the niche markets they served and brand recognition.

Programs continued to be operated separately by the two organizations, although they planned to look for opportunities to consolidate two programs, if possible, in the future. The organizations felt they had complementary services with little overlap.

The organizations agreed to take an evolving approach to administrative integration and retained their separate administrative offices. They put in place common accounting software and a joint purchasing cooperative and made plans to implement, where appropriate, a common salary structure, payroll system, employee benefits system, and personnel policies.

The common board included 17 former New Directions board members and nine former Crossroads board members. The Crossroads board chair became chair of the common board.

The CEO of New Directions became CEO of both New Directions and Crossroads. The CEO of Crossroads became Chief Business Strategist for both organizations, reporting to the CEO; he resigned in June 2011. The Crossroads development director left subsequently. The organizations put in place a COO, CFO, Chief Development Officer, and a Director of Human Resources to oversee both organizations. The program staffing structure remained unchanged in the two organizations.

Restructuring Results as Viewed Two Years Later in 2013

As at the conclusion of the pilot project, New Directions and Crossroads continue as two separate 501(c)(3)s, governed by a common board and identical by-laws. The board currently is comprised of 23 members, with an additional vacant slot to be filled. The composition of the board includes core members from each of the organizations (11 New Directions, 6 Crossroads), but has greater diversity as a result of adding new members. Pursuing a strategic plan developed approximately 18 months ago, New Directions and Crossroads engaged BVU: The Center for Nonprofit Excellence to conduct a board survey and provide assistance in further strengthening the governance function. Board members are perceived to be re-energized and more active.

The organizations retain two separate administrative offices. The finance and accounting functions are located at Crossroads, while integrated development functions are located at New Directions.

In restructuring the two organizations, programs and services were viewed as separate but complementary with the exception of the Alcohol and Drug—Intensive Outpatient Program (which was viewed as overlapping). Since the conclusion of the pilot project, the services offered as part of that program have been consolidated. Overall, Crossroads has experienced substantial growth of nearly 9% in the number of clients served over the last two years. Simultaneously, New Directions has experienced a 10% reduction in the number of clients served. This reduction is viewed as resulting from decreased funding for services combined with increasing competition in Cuyahoga County, where there are more organizations providing the same or similar services.

Board and staff leadership view Crossroads as a "big fish in a small pond." Growth opportunities are viewed as much better in Lake County and the organizations are pursuing them. Examples of potential programmatic opportunities include youth in transition services, Help Me Grow, sexual offenders assessment and treatment, and prevention services in schools.

The combined organizations have approximately 140 employees compared to 145 pre-restructuring. Post-consolidation work has been directed towards creating one employee handbook, aligning benefits, integrating the payroll system, and developing more integrated training programs. Although recruiting continues to be done separately, there is one recruiting system which allows for candidates to be considered by both organizations.

In the technology area, new clinical and billing systems are in place for the restructured organizations. Some ongoing consultation still is required to further upgrade and become even more efficient. Currently, all technological support is outsourced to two different vendors. Consideration is now being given to establishing this support capacity in-house. Given the size (in terms of staff, budgets, and geographic reach) of the combined organizations, leadership perceives New Directions and Crossroads as viable candidates for public and philanthropic support to establish this internal capacity.

The restructured organizations have attained some cost savings and organizational efficiencies. Cost savings have occurred as a result of having one CEO, one COO, one CFO, and one Chief Development Officer. Health insurance renewal in 2013 yielded approximately $60,000 in savings and 2014 quotes range from 0% to 8% in cost increases. Combined property/casualty and directors and officers insurance coverage has provided savings of $10,000. It is anticipated the organizations will achieve additional cost efficiencies in 2014 related to trade association dues, going through the Joint Commission (JCAHO) national accreditation and licensing process together, and a shared electronic health record system providing billing and accounting efficiencies. While leadership perceives these results as impressive, there is recognition that the organizations have "hit something of a ceiling" in attaining additional efficiencies because this restructuring is not a complete merger.

Although New Directions' and Crossroads' leadership perceives the combined organizations to be more strategically positioned to pursue both public funding and philanthropic support, the post-pilot project experience in the area of fundraising has offered challenges. Advice was sought from a number of top donors to each of the organizations as to how to strengthen the fundraising function. As a consequence, there is now one plan for annual appeals, and a planned giving program for each organization is being developed. In retrospect, leaders of the restructured organizations perceive they significantly underestimated the importance of community relations functions such as attending public events or providing monetary support for such events, especially in Lake County. During the last two years, much effort has been expended in strengthening community relations skills and practices, with much more time allocated for such activity.

The respective strengths of the combined organizations, coupled with the additional years of working together since the conclusion of the pilot project, have heightened interest in creating an umbrella organization and adding new partners with $5-10 million operating budgets. Business opportunities will dictate when and with whom such partnering may be done.

The integration of organizational cultures initially was perceived as a considerable challenge, but has turned out to be less difficult in practice than anticipated. Monthly meetings of managers and periodic integration management meetings with the executive team have proven to be very helpful. The success of these efforts has filtered down to the remainder of the staff; thus, little culture integration work has been done at the direct service worker level.

Leadership perceives the organizational restructuring to be a success. There is a shared perception that both organizations are "better off" now than each was two years ago. As noted by the leadership team, results from periodic staff surveys, the BVU survey, and support provided by funders and donors support this perception.

Four specific issues have proven to be the most challenging in New Directions' and Crossroads' restructuring process and activities.

First, the branding of the restructured organizations has been challenging. In retrospect, the term "partnership" likely would have served the organizations better. While some common language has been developed, comprehensive branding remains elusive because the two organizations serve different clientele in distinct counties and report to different planning and funding boards (such as United Way of Cuyahoga County and the United Way of Lake County).

Second, the issue of external messaging has been particularly challenging given perceived differences in the external environments in Cuyahoga and Lake Counties. The restructured organizations continue to develop separate printed materials based on these perceived differences.

Third, combining accreditation timing, process, and related matters has presented some difficulty.

Finally, the necessity of operating two separate administrative offices—one in each county—has presented challenges in terms of time allocation and meeting scheduling for staff and board.

There were significant gaps in the available resources needed to make this restructuring a success. Overall, New Directions and Crossroads requested $300,000 from various funders and received $206,500, approximately 66% of the requested amount. Foundation support was received for conversion of a project manager position into a Chief Operating Officer position, development of the employee handbook ($75,000), website redesign ($50,000), accounting system integration ($37,500), strategic planning ($20,000), and organizational culture integration ($12,000). Additionally, the United Ways of Cuyahoga and Lake Counties contributed $12,000 to support this restructuring effort.

GENERAL OBSERVATIONS ON THE EXPERIENCE OF THE RESTRUCTURED ORGANIZATIONS

Looking back, the organizations that completed restructuring highlighted and strongly confirmed earlier conclusions about the importance in strategic restructuring of relationship building and trust; strong board and executive leadership; thoughtful and thorough negotiations; thorough due diligence; high quality facilitation; and complementary visions and goals.

From their perspective in 2013, they all view their organizational restructuring as successful in that they all have experienced:

> ***Improved financial positions.*** All four clusters have realized cost savings through reduced overhead and benefits expenses, and three have significantly reduced administrative salary expense. While many have experienced both positive and negative impacts on fundraising in connection with restructuring, all report receiving new sources of funding and being financially more stable.
>
> ***Improved operations.*** The restructuring process caused them to look critically at their systems and processes, and they found a number of ways to work better and more effectively.
>
> ***Higher visibility, enhanced status, and greater credibility.*** All feel that, as a result of restructuring, their organizations have stronger images and reputations and have more leverage in their fields. They also find that others now look to them for expertise about restructuring.

The restructured organizations identified additional commonalities in their restructuring experiences, including the following:

> ***They all have become more comfortable with, and are interested in further pursuing, collaborative activity.*** All organizations report that they understand better how to approach and manage collaboration. All are more willing and, indeed, are eager to engage in more collaborative efforts.
>
> ***Three of the organizations have experienced changes in senior management.*** In all four clusters, the CEO of one of the partners was identified pre-restructuring as the post-restructuring CEO, and that person remains in place. In three organizations, however, there have been significant changes in other senior management positions, highlighting the importance of careful pre-restructuring planning for changes in leadership, as well as the reality that expectations and decisions in that regard may need to be revisited during the implementation phase.
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> ***They required more post-restructuring transition and implementation assistance than anticipated.*** Completion of the restructuring transaction was only an intermediate step; all clusters faced (and continue to face) a great deal more work and expense to successfully integrate cultures and operations. Support for this post-transaction work from the foundation community has been uneven.
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> ***The most significant post-restructuring issues have centered on human resources, rebranding and repositioning, fundraising, cultural integration, and technology.*** Earlier thoughts on the importance of thorough due diligence and preparation have only been confirmed with time; where the organizations were able to plan in advance there have been fewer issues. In some situations, especially with regard to human resources decisions, organizations wish they had made necessary decisions sooner.
>
> ***They all feel that support from funders is critical and can take a variety of forms.*** The organizations that completed restructurings note that the ordinary demands on the leaders of nonprofit organizations are intense, and taking on a restructuring requires a great deal of extra effort and resources. Support from funders is critical.
>
> There are a number of different ways funders can help, even given individual differences in policies and priorities. First, to help create an environment favorable to restructuring, funders can provide essential support through education and convening efforts. During the individual phases of the restructuring transaction (exploration, planning, and implementation/integration), funders can provide financial support for process facilitation, technical and expert advice, and direct operational costs. Finally, through all phases of collaboration, funders can provide valuable non-financial support in the form of introductions, referrals, general counsel, and ongoing moral support.

THE PILOT PROJECT IN RETROSPECT

Views on the pilot project as a model for supporting strategic restructuring have not changed significantly since its conclusion. Its major strengths are perceived by funders, organizations, and others to include its (a) emphasis on learning; (b) provision of a process and resources to support restructuring transactions; (c) inclusion of careful assessment and feasibility analyses which, while challenging for the organizations at the time, revealed themselves to be very valuable; (d) provision of expert consultants, who provided valuable information and support, ensured adherence to a timeline, and guided the organizations' efforts without imposing direction; and (e) provision of a new arena in which funders, organizations, and others could all work together on a common project.

Views expressed in retrospect about the most significant limitations of the model were consistent with those expressed at the project's conclusion. Participants noted that (a) the model underestimated, or did not account for, all of the time, energy, and particularly money required post-implementation (and, to a lesser but real extent during the pre-restructuring period) to achieve a successful result; (b) the timelines were not sufficiently flexible, and year-end deadlines were difficult for the organizations to manage; (c) the model would also be improved by greater flexibility in other areas—such as allowing nonprofits more input into the choice of their process consultants and allowing nonprofits to choose the areas in which funding support is most critical to them; and (d) the communications firm and the Nonprofit Advisory Group could have been better used.

Interviewees provided the following additional thoughts on the model with the benefit of hindsight:

> ***The model would benefit from the inclusion of clear outcomes measurement criteria.*** It has become clearer in retrospect that building more rigorous outcomes measurement into the model would be beneficial. Such a system would help organizations focus on the purposes of restructuring, provide a better means of tracking progress, enhance the educational value of the model, and provide common ground for discussions among funders and organizations about how best to support restructuring. Continued work in the field to articulate the outcomes that indicate restructuring success (and relevant timeframes for measurement) will undoubtedly contribute to improved planning, implementation, and assessment of restructuring activity.
>
> ***Public sector representation is important.*** With the passage of time, and as the topic of collaboration has gained ground generally, it has become clearer that public sector representation in human services restructuring and other collaborative efforts is essential to achieve maximum benefit, and future models should take this need into account.

The pilot project model is replicable. The model created successful restructurings that are meeting their intended goals. The model can be built on and used in many ways.

There is a desire for more follow-up. At the two-year point, a number of participants in the Collaborative (funders and others) expressed significant disappointment in the perceived lack of follow-up to the Collaborative and the resulting perceived loss of momentum in the region for strategic restructuring and collective action. There is a sense among this group that funders should be doing more—promptly and thoroughly—to demonstrate their conviction that strategic restructuring and collective action are high values.

THE FUNDERS COLLABORATIVE IN RETROSPECT

As the Collaborative wound up in 2011, most participating funders were pleased with its results. They viewed the number of restructuring transactions completed as good—even impressive—and the level of dialogue created around restructuring as very valuable. A few funders, particularly those who anticipated immediate, demonstrable cost savings or a large number of restructuring transactions, were disappointed. There was a strong sense across the board, nonetheless, that the Collaborative had increased awareness of, and knowledge about, restructuring and that the nonprofit community's perception of mergers and consolidations had become more positive; they felt that the whole notion of collaboration, among both funders and nonprofits, had been moved higher on people's agendas. Funders also cited greater awareness of the financial and other costs and challenges of restructuring and expressed greater willingness to support restructuring costs.

In 2013, all members of the Collaborative interviewed viewed the pilot project to be a success, although there continues to be dissatisfaction among some participants about the number of restructurings achieved in comparison to the cost of the project, and these participants would like to see the model for supporting restructuring become more cost-effective.

"Learning" by and among funders, by nonprofits, and between funders and nonprofits was repeatedly mentioned as the primary value of the Collaborative experience. Members noted the benefits of getting to know other funders while developing deeper appreciation for restructuring processes. Several foundation representatives indicated that lessons learned from the Collaborative had been brought to their boards for discussion and in some cases had been integrated into their own organizations' strategic planning efforts.

"Getting the conversation started" and moving the conversation about collaboration outside the silos of funders and nonprofits were also noted as key values of the Collaborative. Funders felt the Collaborative opened dialogue among them about their role in encouraging nonprofits to consider collaboration and providing a "safe place" for nonprofits to learn about and explore restructuring. They also felt that the Collaborative provided a means of delivering a message to nonprofits in a manner that seemed less directive and forceful. Funders noted their sense that the level of trust between funders and nonprofits on the subject of restructuring had been enhanced and that the power differential between the two groups had to some extent been diffused (although in the interviews these feelings appeared to be more strongly felt on the funders' side than by the nonprofit organizations).

Helping to raise awareness of restructuring as a strategic option was noted as another important outcome of the Collaborative. Funders felt the Collaborative helped nonprofits to think about the spectrum of collaborative activity and view restructuring as a positive act of strength and progressive thinking, as opposed to an organizational salvage effort. Nonprofit organizations now regularly consider collaborative opportunities when undertaking strategic planning, and new organizational capacities are being built to support them (such as The

Foundation Center's "Understanding Collaboration" class and the incorporation by BVU: The Center for Nonprofit Excellence of collaboration into its consultative work).

A majority of Collaborative members report tracking collaborative activity among nonprofit organizations following the pilot project, most typically on an informal basis including noting requests for funding. Nearly all of these members indicated that this sensitivity was not related specifically to their participation in the Collaborative, but that the Collaborative reinforced their awareness. A majority of Collaborative members reported an impression that collaborative activity among northeast Ohio nonprofits had increased moderately or significantly (although others reported no change). A majority of funders also reported making post-Collaborative grants in support of restructuring, including both direct and capacity-building support.

Information about the pilot project has been posted on The Foundation Center's website,[16] which is the primary vehicle for the dissemination of information about the Collaborative. The co-chairs have spoken widely (locally, statewide, and nationally) about the Collaborative, and a number of other funders have also spoken to and with funder peers and their own staff and board members. Many organization representatives have done the same, speaking with peers, institutional and individual donors, and others in the community.

At the two-year mark, the funders also confirmed earlier conclusions on the value to the Collaborative of strong leadership; good communication among funders; existing relationships and trust among funders and between funders and nonprofits; transparency; expert consultants; and strong commitment from the nonprofits. They continued to feel that the Collaborative had heightened understanding among funders that collaboration is much more challenging than may first appear.

[16] http://foundationcenter.org/

WHERE TO FROM HERE?

When asked if foundations should consider supporting restructuring as part of their individual activities or through intentional partnerships with other foundations, foundation representatives expressed support for both avenues, with a majority of funders stating that additional funders collaboratives should be created in the future. There was broad support for a concept that would provide for permanent, ready "go-to" resources (financial, consultative, matchmaking, and educational) to support pre- and post-restructuring efforts. Thoughts offered ranged from establishing programs within existing nonprofit support centers (such as The Foundation Center and BVU: The Center for Nonprofit Excellence), to a foundation-based pool of funds set aside and available to nonprofits for pursuing restructuring goals, to an incentive-based funding system to encourage nonprofits to pursue collaboration and restructuring.

There was equally broad consensus among funders and others that funders collaboratives represent a promising approach for the future, not only as a way to promote and support restructuring but also as a way for the foundation community to address other gaps in capacity in the nonprofit sector such as:

- High-quality financial management and financial systems, including how to achieve both short- and long-term financial sustainability and best methods of revenue generation and diversification
- Legal advice and assistance
- Marketing and communications
- Technology
- Succession planning for key board and staff positions
- Leadership development for nonprofit professionals
- Strong governance
- Outcomes measurement
- Volunteer management

There were also recommendations that:

- Financial and other support for restructuring be considered a priority for all foundations.
- All foundation board members and key staff be educated regarding collaboration, especially strategic restructuring.
- Funders identify ways to help ensure that grantees are able to build the skills, relationships, and resources to work together effectively.[17]
- Funders "practice what they preach" and create a common proposal format and a system to allow organizations to make one presentation simultaneously to multiple funders.
- Funders provide flexible, multi-year funding for exploring and implementing restructuring efforts.
- Funders utilize their reputational capital to attract attention to, and additional financial support for, collaborative activities.
- A system of regular communication (such as a monthly or quarterly newsletter) be put in place for funders, nonprofits, and the entire community to provide information, examples, and other education and news about collaboration.
- Funders collaboratives focused on restructuring and collaboration be extended to all nonprofit subsectors.
- Funders in northeast Ohio work with other active leaders such as Philanthropy Ohio to expand the geographic scope of education and support for collaborative activity state-wide and beyond.

The nonprofit organization representatives interviewed strongly favored more collaborative activity by funders in the future, noting the value of shared agendas and common impact. This group would like to see funders collectively:

- Focusing on supporting investigation of broad issues such as prevention (where will the community be in 20 years with and without the benefit of prevention; what kind of investment in prevention services would be worthwhile?); transportation to services (an emerging issue impacting access and effectiveness); creating a culture of innovation within nonprofit organizations; the impacts of national health care; and funding patterns across fields.

[17] See Grantmakers for Effective Organizations, "Working Better Together: Building Nonprofit Collaborative Capacity" (September 2013). Available at http://geofunders.org/geo-publications/704-working-better-together

- Focusing on boundary-spanning initiatives by (a) convening relevant groups (e.g., all organizations addressing basic human needs) to explore how they can address such needs through networked efforts[18] and (b) building capacity for shared infrastructure.

- Focusing not just on funding for the *provision* of tools for nonprofits (such as technology) but also on *leveraging them* (for example, education on how to use technology to their maximum benefit). Similarly, foundations can support not just the use of outcome measurement, but the why and how of using it for maximum effectiveness.

- Working to influence positive views by governmental regulatory and funding bodies on collaboration and strategic restructuring.

Some (but not all) participants specifically favored more assertiveness by funders in encouraging and funding strategic restructuring, to be demonstrated in such ways as funders "guiding" newly emerging nonprofits to existing organizations to explore collaborative opportunities and provision of incentives to pursue and achieve restructuring.

[18] See Third Sector New England, "Funding Learning Networks for Community Impact: Lessons from the Capacity Building Fund" (2013). Available at http://www.tsne.org/site/c.ghLUK3PCLoF/b.8582227/k.8C5F/Funding_Learning_Networks_For_Community_Impact/apps/ka/ct/contactus.asp?c=ghLUK3PCLoF&b=8582227&en=bkJLL0PHJaIULaPKL9IQJcN1LlIOL7NRIeJRL5NTJuLbH

KEY THEMES AND LESSONS LEARNED

At the two-year mark, participants in the Collaborative strongly reaffirmed the key themes and lessons learned that they articulated in 2011. In particular, they continue to endorse the following:

> ***Everyone has something to learn.*** In addition to practical benefits, collaborative activity is frequently educational for funders, nonprofit organizations, consultants, and others. Ongoing knowledge development is of value to the entire community and should be an explicit goal of philanthropic collaboration in support of strategic realignment in the nonprofit sector. Knowledge, once developed, should be shared and applied to support continuous improvement.
>
> ***Leadership is indispensable.*** Strong leadership from funders and nonprofit board members and executives is necessary to create change and achieve success. It is not practical to wait for "everyone" to sign on. Leaders must exhibit an open mindset, the ability to share power and responsibility, adaptability and flexibility, and strong connectivity and relationship building.[19]
>
> ***Trust makes things happen.*** Collaboration occurs at the speed of trust. Trust is the glue that holds the process together, and it needs to be created, nurtured, and sustained.
>
> ***Structure is essential, but one size does not fit all.*** In order to gain traction and meet with success, collaborative projects need to have enough structure to create common expectations, goals, and standards; provide a roadmap for the work; and provide the tools and resources necessary for success. They also need to allow flexibility sufficient to accommodate different viewpoints and needs in pursuit of a common purpose.
>
> ***Doing the deal is one thing; making the deal work is another.*** "Making the deal work" is real and sometimes messy work, often more complicated and costly than initially expected. Funders and nonprofit organizations should recognize and plan for long-term engagement to make strategic restructuring successful.
>
> ***The last chapter takes a long time to write.*** Because organizational restructuring is a complicated process, and organizations and the nonprofit sector are inherently dynamic, successful restructuring requires extended vision and effort. Funders and nonprofits should build in multi-year evaluations and anticipate the use of common standards and tools for outcome assessment currently under development in the field.

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[19] These capacities are now known to support and enable collective action among nonprofit organizations. Grantmakers for Effective Organizations, "Working Better Together: Building Nonprofit Collaborative Capacity" (September 2013). Available at http://geofunders.org/geo-publications/704-working-better-together

Some additional key themes and lessons learned were articulated by participants in the Collaborative (particularly the nonprofit organizations) in 2013:

Working together—albeit challenging—is better than working alone. Issues facing the nonprofit community are difficult and complex; working together leverages human and financial resources, sparks creativity, and allows the problems to be tackled from multiple perspectives.

Collaboration is fundamental to the new normal. In order to reap the very significant benefits of working together, funders and nonprofit organizations must be prepared to change their ways and develop new capacities.

Restructuring is a savvy, strategic option. Successful restructuring can yield many benefits that can help a nonprofit organization to do more and better; there are a host of positive reasons to collaborate. Restructuring need not be perceived as being related to weakness, financial difficulty, or organizational survival. Where an organization is struggling, analysis should focus on whether restructuring will produce an organization with sufficient strength for sustainability, and in some such cases valuable services or assets can be saved through such an effort.

Form follows function. When considering collaboration, organizations will benefit from, first, considering the nature and degree of integration that will help them best meet their service goals—and then using expert advice to help them choose a legal structure that will support those goals and address any relevant collateral issues such as contracts or credentialing.

Collaboration spurs collaboration. The experience of participating in a successful restructuring can inspire and empower nonprofit organizations to seek additional collaborative opportunities. Similarly, funders' positive experiences collaborating with other funding partners can stimulate a desire to apply collaborative energy to a host of new domains, including those that are related to restructuring as well as those that address other pressing issues. Momentum generated from successful collaborative effort is valuable and should be maintained.

A spirit of transparency and a commitment to thoughtful, clear, boundary-spanning communication can help to level the power imbalance between grantmakers and grantseekers, ultimately resulting in better outcomes for the community as a whole. Breaking down barriers is not easy, but genuine exchange of viewpoints and authentic dialogue are key values that can be built on.

APPENDICES

APPENDIX I – LIST OF INTERVIEWEES IN FIRST CASE STUDY

Neville Arjani, Youth Opportunities Unlimited
Cynthia Bailie, The Foundation Center–Cleveland
Elizabeth Banwell, Maine Association of Nonprofits
Eli Becker, New Directions, Inc.
Terry Bishop, Dominion Foundation
Tara Broderick, Planned Parenthood of Northeast Ohio
Vikki Broer, Weathertop Foundation
Keith Burwell, Toledo Community Foundation
Carrie Carpenter, Charter One Foundation
Brian Collier, Foundation of the Carolinas
Mike Crislip, Crossroads
Jo DeBolt, La Piana Consulting
David Doll, West Side Ecumenical Ministry
Marcia Egbert, The George Gund Foundation
George Espy, Ohio Grantmakers Forum
William Eyman, Bellflower Center for Prevention of Child Abuse
Michael Farrell, Center for Families and Children
Polly Furey, Domestic Violence Center
Leah Gary, The William J. and Dorothy K. O'Neill Foundation
Walter Ginn, The Frank Hadley Ginn and Cornelia Root Ginn Charitable Trust
Kathy Hallissey, The Cleveland Foundation
Chris Hitchcock, Fred A. Lennon Charitable Trust
Karen Hooser, The Reinberger Foundation
Pam Howell-Beach, Stranahan Foundation
Linda Dooley Johanek, Domestic Violence Center
Sharon Sobol Jordan, Center for Families and Children
David Kantor, Kantor Consulting Group
Peter Kramer, Catalyst Fund for Nonprofits
Howard Landau, Landau Communications
Todd Lloyd, Ohio Grantmakers Forum
Michael Matoney, New Directions, Inc.
Amy Main Morgenstern, Main Stream Enterprises, Inc.
Deborah Perkins, E CITY
Judy Peters, West Side Ecumenical Ministry
Robert Reuter, The Reuter Foundation
Carol Rivchun, Youth Opportunities Unlimited
Jill Rizika, Towards Employment
Beth Rosenberg, E CITY
Judith Simpson, United Way of Greater Cleveland

Cristin Slesh, The Abington Foundation; Eva L. and Joseph M. Bruening Foundation;
The Thomas H. White Foundation
Barbara Stonerock, The Dayton Foundation
Leslie Strnisha, Sisters of Charity Foundation
Peter Taylor, Maine Community Foundation
Deborah Vesy, Deaconess Community Foundation
Denise San Antonio Zeman, Saint Luke's Foundation

APPENDIX II – LIST OF INTERVIEWEES IN TWO-YEAR FOLLOW-UP STUDY

Terry Bishop, Dominion Foundation
Tim Boehnlein, Domestic Violence & Child Advocacy Center
Brian Broadbent, BVU: The Center for Nonprofit Excellence; Youth Opportunities Unlimited
Carrie Carpenter, Charter One Foundation
Mike Crislip, New Directions/Crossroads
Jo DeBolt, La Piana Consulting
Craig Dorn, Youth Opportunities Unlimited
Pat Dugan, The Centers for Families and Children
Marcia Egbert, The George Gund Foundation
Leah Gary, The William J. and Dorothy K. O'Neill Foundation
Walter Ginn, The Frank Hadley Ginn and Cornelia Root Ginn Charitable Trust
Kathy Hallissey, The Cleveland Foundation
David Holmes, Foundation Center—Cleveland
Karen Hooser, The Reinberger Foundation
Alice Iden, New Directions/Crossroads
Linda Dooley Johanek, Domestic Violence & Child Advocacy Center
Sharon Sobol Jordan, The Centers for Families and Children
David Kantor, Kantor Consulting Group
Michael Matoney, New Directions/Crossroads
Karen Mitrisin, Domestic Violence & Child Advocacy Center
Amy Main Morgenstern, Main Stream Enterprises, Inc.
Elizabeth Newman, The Centers for Families and Children
Judy Peters, The Centers for Families and Children
Robert Reuter, The Reuter Foundation
Carol Rivchun, Youth Opportunities Unlimited
Jill Rizika, Towards Employment
Ron Soeder, Boys & Girls Club of Cleveland
Cristin Slesh, The Abington Foundation; Eva L. and Joseph M. Bruening Foundation;
The Thomas H. White Foundation
Deborah Vesy, Deaconess Foundation
Elizabeth Voudouris, BVU: The Center for Nonprofit Excellence
Allison Wallace, Neighborhood Centers Association
Denise San Antonio Zeman, Saint Luke's Foundation
Judy Zupancic, New Directions/Crossroads

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