

CROSSING ORGANIZATIONAL BOUNDARIES TO BUILD NEW PARTNERSHIPS

A SERIES OF 5% SHIFTS: PARTNERSHIP

ABOUT THIS SERIES

The Building Movement Project develops tools that help organizations align their social change principles with their social service practices. Our research and experience shows that relatively small shifts in service provision can cause ripple effects; raising up constituent voice, fostering community cohesion and increasing engagement in advocacy efforts. This series highlights “5% shifts”—as we are calling them—that don’t rely on organizations completely changing course and reinventing themselves. We lift up shifts that are both simple and achievable, to inspire service providers to adapt what works.

These reports are structured to include both conceptual framing based on research and literature in the sector, as well as case studies of on-the-ground experiments initiated by organizations. They also include discussion materials and other resources to help staff and leaders reflect on the case examples and apply the lessons to their own organizations. We hope that organizations will take what is useful, build on their strengths, and exercise judgment and wisdom in tailoring these examples to make “5% shifts” that fit their specific community and organizational contexts.

We invite organizations to spread these lessons and learning throughout the nonprofit sector, and to reach out to BMP to share experiences or to request additional resources or coaching. Feel free to email BMP Co-Director Sean Thomas-Breitfeld at sthomas-breitfeld@demos.org.

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INTRODUCTION AND FRAMEWORK:

CROSSING ORGANIZATIONAL BOUNDARIES

Service agencies are often aware that the people they serve are slipping through the holes in the social safety net. Sometimes the difficulties faced by clients are due to the complex maze of governmental programs, and sometimes the challenge is that programs are not structured to address the complex constellation of factors contributing to their problems. Unfortunately, organizations can be stymied in their efforts to patch up the safety net by siloes (whether by population, geography, or issues) that make the provision of adequate care difficult. Since most communities have a wide range of groups aimed at addressing the needs of community members, coordination and partnership within and between organizations can be a powerful strategy for beginning to address some of the gaps in service delivery systems.

This report explores partnerships initiated in cities in two different parts of the country that are facing similar social and economic struggles: Detroit and Albuquerque. The economic and political problems of Detroit have received widespread media attention, and many residents grapple with everyday concerns of living in a city with minimal resources. One major issue is summed up in the fact that Detroit has been labeled “a food desert.”¹ Storehouse of Hope, a local food pantry, partnered with a growing urban garden to provide fresh produce to clients. The partnership became a catalyst for new connections, relationships and forays into advocating on other issues impacting clients. Similarly, New Mexico recently fell to last place for child well-being in the 2013 *KIDS COUNT* Data Book.² In Albuquerque (the state’s largest city), three organizations — Encuentro, New Mexico Immigrant

Law Center, and Prosperity Works — collaborated to establish an individual lending program to help immigrants in the community get funds they need to pay the various application fees associated with the naturalization and citizenship process. They recognized that each group brought unique areas of expertise that complemented the other partners and leveraged those different strengths to help immigrants pursue their American dreams.

In the research on collaboration between social service agencies, the concept of “a continuum of services”³ has been critical to establishing the impetus for organizations to work together. An earlier report in this series (“Advancing Community Level Impact”) profiled the Mutual Assistance Network of Del Paso Heights (MAN) in California that has a conceptual framework based on a continuum to cover the needs of clients across a wide variety of family conditions ranging from “unstable homes” to “stable but not thriving” and ultimately to “thriving homes” to broader community changes. In most cases, communities have distinct organizations targeting different levels on the continuum of services. However, many groups are figuring out how to knit their programs and services together.

There are several factors for organizations to keep in mind when they initiate efforts to coordinate services and partner across different organizations. The first maxim for organizations, leaders and staff is that “collaboration is a developmental process.”⁴ Second, leadership is an important precondition, but the leaders of partnerships do not need to be organizational directors. Collaboration can be sparked by leaders at any level (including, and sometimes especially, clients

1 Gallagher, Mari

2 Annie E. Casey Foundation

3 Fitch, Dale.

4 Rivard, Jeanne C. and Joseph P. Morrissey

and grassroots members) who realize that they would be served by greater alignment. Third, the alignment is often expressed in a collective vision, the starting point for partnerships between organizations, which is also critical to sustaining collaboration over the long-term.

In some very deep collaborations, there can be a lengthy and involved process of developing systems and practices requiring meetings and conversations that build relationships of trust, create shared procedures and philosophies, and develop agreed upon ways to communicate and work together. In some cases investments in new technologies — such as a pooled Voter Activation Network (special software for organizations that do voter outreach) — have helped organizations coordinate and amplify their advocacy and community outreach efforts. Breaking down the silos between service providers and the barriers between providers, advocates and organizers is critical to knitting together and protecting a strong social safety net that helps individuals in need. Furthermore, fostering collaboration between organizations (and oftentimes even within organizations) can help better identify community level issues that a strong ecosystem of organizations can address together.

QUESTIONS FOR REFLECTION:

In what ways are services of your organization not designed or able to meet the full range of challenges faced by your clients?

What organizations in your community are doing work that might complement your own organization's services and contributions? Organization's strategies for responding to your social context?

CASE EXAMPLE 1:

LOCAL PARTNERSHIPS FOR HEALTHY FOOD

BACKGROUND

S Storehouse of Hope is a frontline food pantry formed through a collaboration of a community-based organization and church members who saw that their patchwork of soup kitchens and emergency food assistance was not enough to provide for the basic food needs of Detroit residents in the North End neighborhood. In just a few years, Storehouse has grown from a mobile pantry delivering boxes of food to a “client choice” pantry⁵ serving more than 1,800 families a year. Since the beginning, Storehouse has aimed to provide fresh and healthy fruits and vegetables, but like other emergency food assistance programs, its local distribution food bank offered mostly non-perishable packaged and dry goods. With the growth of urban agriculture in Detroit and an increased involvement of the Storehouse in the food access movement, Storehouse sought out a local community farm right in the neighborhood to provide more fruits and vegetables to its constituents.

In this case study, we highlight how the food pantry extended beyond traditional partnerships to work with a local farmer to better meet the needs of its constituents. This type of collaboration maximized existing pathways of service, strengthened relationships between institutions in the same geographical region, and expanded social impact.

⁵ “Client choice” is a model of emergency food distribution that enables clients to select their own food, unlike most pantries providing pre-packaged bags of food with no ability to select the items included. Client choice pantries enable clients to meet their personal dietary needs, and honor the agency and sense of dignity of clients. For more information on the “client choice” model, visit the Gleaners Community Food Bank of Southeastern Michigan at http://www.gcfb.org/site/PageServer?pagename=pg_clientchoice, and download “On Your Way to Offering Client Choice: A Handbook for Food Pantries in New York,” developed by the Food Bank of the Southern Tier at <http://foodbankst.org/index.asp?pageid=55>

HOW IT WORKS

Around the same time that Storehouse of Hope was opening its doors, a fledging church-based community organization — North End Christian Community Development Corporation — was finding that people in the same neighborhood wanted access to healthier foods. The CDC formed the Oakland Avenue Community Garden and began growing food on the vacant lots managed by the church. Before long, Northend Christian was able to pay stipends to unemployed individuals in the neighborhood to work on the farm, secured additional funding to build a greenhouse to extend the growing season, and started the weekly Oakland Avenue Farmers Market to sell its produce.

Storehouse received fresh produce from Gleaners Community Food Bank, but distribution was uneven because without refrigeration they had to disperse the food quickly, leaving some families without fresh options. To address this gap, Storehouse sought additional funding to be able to purchase fresh fruits and vegetables from the Oakland Avenue Community Garden as it began to increase its growing capacity.

BEFORE:

A food pantry offers mostly non-perishable food to its constituents.

5% SHIFT:

Partnered with a local urban farm.

IMPACT:

The collaboration leads to delivery of fresh food twice a week, along with other unanticipated community-level benefits.

During the growing season, twice a week, the Community Garden drops off seasonal fresh fruits and vegetables that it has harvested in the morning for distribution that day or the day after. The Garden packages the vegetables according to the pantry's direction. Storehouse is able to make custom orders to adjust to the needs of clients and to food, supplies it has already received that week. In this way, no fresh foods entering the pantry go bad or get wasted.

RESPONSE & IMPACTS

Many residents who go to Storehouse of Hope depend on the pantry to make it through the month. Now they can count on receiving fresher and healthier options harvested just hours before and right from their neighborhood.

The partnership has proved to be a mutually beneficial relationship. Storehouse is able to increase wholesome and nutritious food options to its constituents at the same time that the Oakland Avenue Community Garden can reach the most vulnerable populations in the community. In addition, one of the board members of Storehouse, Reverend Joan Ross of the Greater Woodward Community Development Corporation whose environmental mission overlaps with the Garden's, is collaborating on a grant with the Com-

munity Garden in order to bring solar panels to the greenhouse and further extend its growing season. None of these organizations would have been able to accomplish their goals on their own.

When key safety net institutions like Storehouse of Hope and the Oakland Avenue Community Garden work together, the impact extends beyond the individual organizations and ripple out to the neighborhood. By flexing its purchasing power locally at the Community Garden, Storehouse is putting its dollars to work to grow the number of jobs in the neighborhood and increase its social impact. For Storehouse, supporting a local vendor means strengthening the neighborhood.

THINGS TO CONSIDER:

- Explore partnerships with unlikely local institutions.
- Leverage the strengths of each partner so that the partnership falls within the current scope of work for each.

QUESTIONS FOR REFLECTION:

What values do you need to share with a potential partner who doesn't do the same work or work in the same way that you do? How would you discover or share those values?

Who are the local vendors and businesses you already work with? What other ways can you support each other's work to improve the community?

CASE EXAMPLE 2:

PARTNERING TO SUPPORT IMMIGRANTS' SAVINGS

BACKGROUND

New Mexico families face many significant challenges that are often compounded for immigrant families and mixed-status families (where members of the same family have different citizenship or immigration statuses). According to the 2013 Kids Count Data Book,⁶ the state has the highest percent (55%) of children with a parent who is not a U.S. citizen. Also, roughly a third of immigrants in the state live below the federal poverty line (the highest immigrant poverty rate in the country). New Mexico is already ranked last in the country for the well-being of children, but for immigrants and their families the health, education and economic barriers are even more difficult to overcome.⁷ Given these multiple challenges, a number of organizations are working together in order to help immigrants in the state.

Encuentro is an organization in Albuquerque, New Mexico that provides adult education and training services to Latino immigrants as an entry point to engage them and their families in social change. Encuentro was founded in 2010, the same year as the New Mexico Immigrant Law Center (NMILC), the state's only provider of legal assistance to low-income immigrant families facing separation due to deportation and the other difficulties created by the country's broken immigration system. Encuentro and NMILC are co-located in a building that also houses a grassroots immigrant-led organizing and advocacy group.

This case study explores a partnership that Encuentro and NMILC formed with a third organization – Prosperity Works – to provide low-interest loans to help immigrants cover the fees associated with the complicated (and expensive) application process for naturalization and citizenship.

HOW IT WORKS

As part of its educational programs, Encuentro offers financial literacy classes and helps immigrants open Individual Development Accounts (IDAs), which are matched savings accounts that help people with modest means to save towards the purchase of a lifelong asset, such as a home or higher education. Meanwhile, NMILC's lawyers frequently see immigrants who can't afford to pay the steep fees associated with naturalization.⁸ In June of 2012, the Secretary of Homeland Security announced that certain people who came to the United States as children may request consideration of "deferred action" for a period of two years, subject to renewal, and would then be

BEFORE:

Organizations shared space but were not intentional about coordinating and collaborating on service delivery.

5% SHIFT:

Developed a partnership to establish and administer individual loans.

IMPACT:

Clients gain value from the seamlessness of services and use the loans to cover important expenses.

⁶ <http://datacenter.kidscount.org/>

⁷ Ibid.

⁸ Researchers at the Center for the Study of Immigrant Integration at the University of Southern California explored the obstacles to citizenship created by significant increases in the fees associated with the naturalization process in their report "Nurturing Naturalization: Could Lowering the Fee Help?" <http://csii.usc.edu/NurturingNaturalization.html>

eligible for work authorization. The fees to apply for deferred action, employment authorization and the mandated biometric services are nearly \$1,000.⁹ With the financial burden of applying for citizenship in mind, Encuentro and NMILC decided to embark on a collaborative process to help immigrants secure the resources they needed to cover immigration fees.

Through a grant from a foundation to foster “collaborative impact,” Encuentro, NMILC and Prosperity Works – an intermediary organization that teaches local organizations how to develop and offer effective IDA programs – developed an individual lending program. Each partner had a distinct role in the program’s success. NMILC’s co-founder Jennifer Landau immediately saw the value of lending for immigrants, but admitted “I don’t know that I would have come up with the financial literacy piece on my own.” Through Encuentro, participants gain an understanding of the United States’ financial systems (including the importance of credit ratings) and learn about the loan program. NMILC determines participants’ eligibility for various immigration programs, and Prosperity Works administers the loans. The three organizations also set up a loan committee that includes community members. The individual lending program is still very new, so only a handful of loans have been disbursed, but the model and partnership hold a lot of promise for similar efforts and continued collaboration.

RESPONSE & IMPACTS

The loan program of the three organizations has been greatly appreciated by the immigrants who have been

able to participate. The program’s success is also having a positive impact on the organizations, especially as they anticipate Congress finally passing comprehensive immigration reform that will make it possible for more immigrants to begin the naturalization process and become citizens.

One of the program’s participants named “Guadalupe”¹⁰ emigrated from Mexico, where she had been a teacher. Her husband at the time was already living and working in the U.S., so she and her sons joined him, settling in Albuquerque. After she and her husband divorced, “Lupe” began to volunteer for Encuentro and completed their financial literacy program, opening a bank account and beginning to save money to pay for books her sons needed for school. When the government’s deferred action program was announced, Lupe referred her teenage sons to apply for loans to cover the application costs. She can describe in detail the application process, the low interest rate, the total monthly payment amount each son pays, and how long it will take them to pay off the loan. But according to

THINGS TO CONSIDER:

- Organizations often need to hold different kinds of information on clients, and may have different levels of confidentiality, depending on the services they provide.
- Embrace the opportunity for each organization to do what they do best.

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The U.S. Department of Homeland Security’s website for Citizenship and Immigration Services details the eligibility requirements, filing process and various fees on its website at <http://www.uscis.gov>

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Some personal details have been changed to protect her identity.

Lupe — who now sits on the program’s loan committee — the benefit of the loans goes beyond the fact that her sons will be able to get work permits and establish their credit histories. She said, “The impact is huge for them, they’re losing their fear ... [this program] lets them dream and reach for more.” Lupe, who identifies as a community leader and is very involved in efforts to help other immigrants, also said that the coordination of services is magnificent: “Even though the work they do is different, each organization understands the needs of the community.”

Both Encuentro and NMILC have found a lot of value in partnering on the individual lending program and are looking ahead to more, and even deeper, partnerships. Ms. Landau reflected that the process of setting up the loan program has made her think about her organization’s work more broadly: “helping people get legal status really has to do with economic stability and their ability to participate in society fully.” She also believes that there is still potential for bigger impact and noted that the various organizations serving the immigrant community have yet to identify how all of their services come together for one individual like Guadalupe. Andrea Plaza, the founder of Encuentro agrees: “Just sharing space isn’t enough. All of our organizations are struggling to just do our work, so adding collaboration on top can be challenging. We need more resources to engage with each other in an ongoing, strategic way.”

QUESTIONS FOR REFLECTION:

Do you know of any clients who engage with both your programs and the programs of another organization?

How might collaborating with other organizations improve outcomes for clients?

DISCUSSION GUIDE

Purpose of this Discussion:

Have participants reflect on the case studies and their own experiences, in order to explore opportunities and strategies to cross organizational boundaries.

Hoped-For Outcomes:

- Explore the value and potential for working across organizational boundaries to address client and community needs as a whole
- Consider the internal systems and structures that could support this shift

60-MINUTE AGENDA AND DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

Round of Introductions and Personal Reflection 15 min

Start with a round of introductions where people respond to the following statement:

In what ways have you not been able to meet the full range of challenges faced by your clients?

If time allows, ask for reflections on common themes or specific case stories/examples of when this is a result of how the organization is designed or structured.

Reflect on Your Organization's Work in the Context of the Case Studies 20 min

Explore the organization's current focus on working with other groups:

What organizations in our community are doing work that might complement our services?

Do we currently work with any of these groups? Are any of them different types of organizations (i.e. advocacy or organizing groups)?

Consider the possibilities for, and impacts of, shifting the organization's focus towards crossing boundaries:

How would a partnership with another local group mutually benefit our organizations? What would we gain by engaging in this partnership? What would they gain?

What value or meaning might staff derive from engaging in new partnerships? How might it resonate with staff interests and commitments? How might it challenge staff?

Explore Systems and Structures to Support Crossing Boundaries 20 min

Consider the organization's current structure:

What staff relationships already exist with other local groups that could be built upon?

What formal partnerships already exist that could be expanded?

Explore ideas for crossing boundaries:

Identify up to three existing partnerships that could be expanded or strengthened to improve the community.

Brainstorm up to three new partnerships that could be explored.

Closing and Evaluation 5 min

Ask people to identify one thing they liked and one thing they would change about the conversation.

Close the discussion and thank people for their participation.

Note: If there was energy about developing organizational strategies for crossing boundaries, invite people to participate in a follow-up meeting, using the guide and worksheet on the following pages.

FOLLOW-UP DISCUSSION GUIDE AND EXERCISE

Purpose of this Discussion:

For those individuals who were particularly engaged or excited by the last meeting, you can use this agenda and worksheet to create a “continuum of care” model for your community. This model includes the range of services that would be needed to support individuals and families at all stages, beyond what one organization alone could provide. It is a way to begin identifying partners and allies in your community.

Hoped-For Outcomes:

- Develop a continuum of care model for your community
- Identify how programs and services can meet the needs and interests of community residents across a range of family conditions and circumstances
- Identify allies and partners who can be a part of this work

90-MINUTE AGENDA AND DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

Round of Introductions and Personal Reflection 10 min

Start with a round of introductions where people respond to the following prompt(s):

(If any participants were not part of the first meeting, have them first reflect on this statement) In what ways have you not been able to meet the full range of challenges faced by your clients?

(For those who participated in the first meeting) What was one takeaway you had from our last discussion together? Why was it important to you?

Note: You may want to write down answers to the second question on a flipchart for everyone to see and remember.

Introduce the Exercise 15 min

Explain that the goal of this exercise is to help participants consider how your organization can be part of a larger network addressing client and community needs along a continuum.

Give each person a copy of the attached worksheet, along with the example created by Mutual Assistance Network of Del Paso Heights (MAN).

Review the MAN example together as a group. Things to highlight include:

The three stages MAN has identified at the bottom of the chart and think about comparable stages for your community.

The areas where MAN can act on its own as a service provider, and where it needs to partner with other organizations.

The “Community Change” box. Think about what these goals might be for your community and how your current services contribute to them.

Small Group Work 25 min

Break into small groups of about 3 or 4 people and ask each group to discuss and fill-in the attached worksheet. (NOTE: some services will span and apply to multiple stages)

As they work, ask them to think about the following questions:

What range of services would be needed to support individuals and families at each point along the continuum?

Who can provide those services in our community now?

Where are their gaps and how would we begin to fill them?

CONTINUED

Full Group Discussion 30 min

Have one or two groups present their continuum of care to the larger group.

As they present have each presenter highlight:

Any 'A-ha!' moments from the group discussion.

Where the group struggled.

After each presentation, have members of the wider group offer feedback, observations and comparisons to their own findings during the exercise.

After the selected groups have finished presenting, discuss together what the stages at the bottom of your continuum should be. Each stage should reflect the various states that individuals and families can be in from unstable to a thriving, strong community. For example, in the MAN model the left-hand column is "unstable homes," followed by "stable, but not thriving homes," and finally "thriving homes".

Have the group discuss:

What points along this hypothetical continuum does your organizational work currently address?

What other organizations do you know of that are addressing other points along the continuum?

Any common themes or recommendations they would make about incorporating this model into your current practice?

Closing and Evaluation 10 min

Ask people to share:

Something they learned, or a moment in the discussion that surprised them.

One thing they liked and one thing they would change about the conversation.

Close the discussion and thank people for their participation.

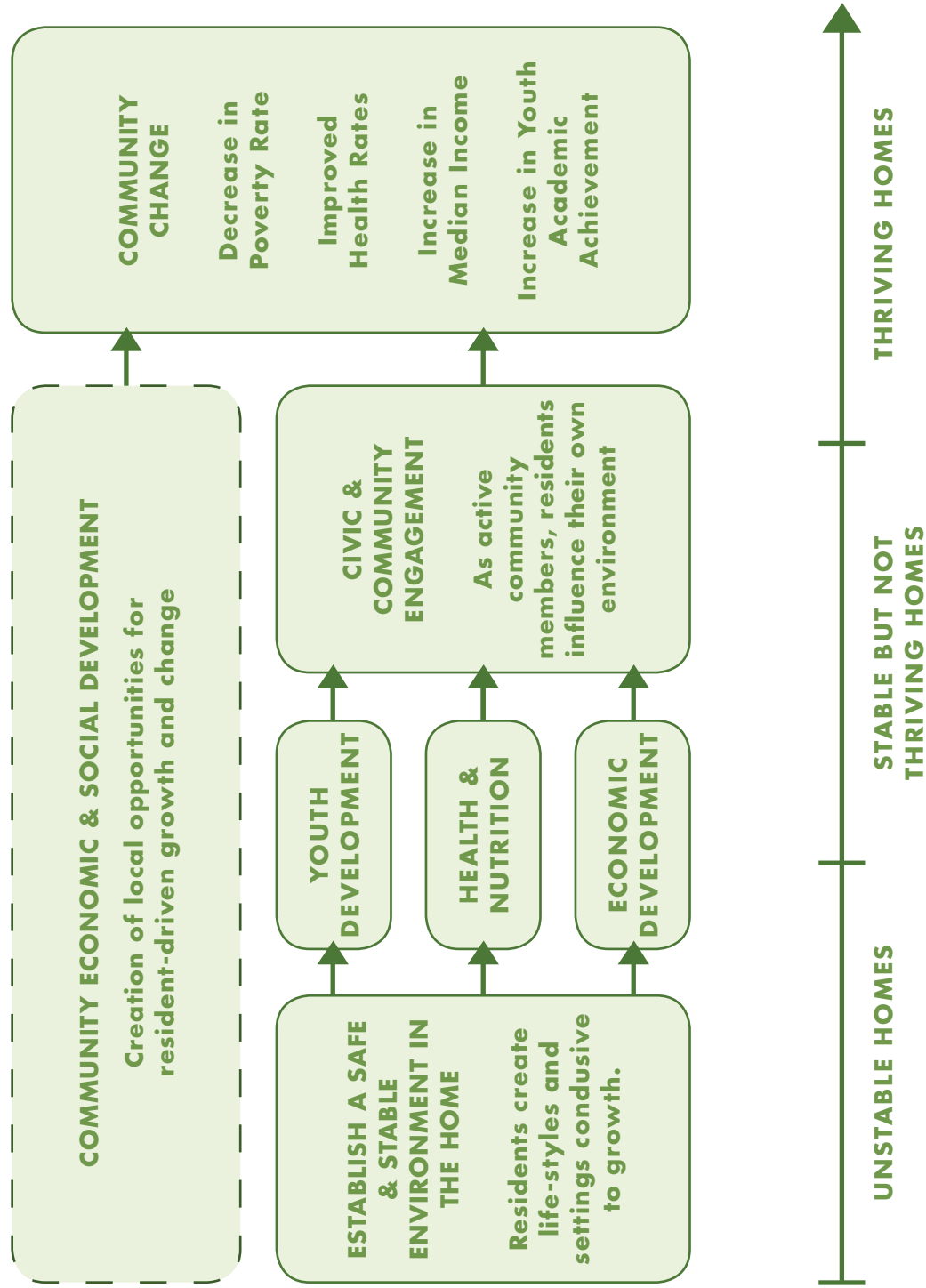
CONTINUUM OF CHANGE WORKSHEET

<p>GOAL IN STAGE 1: (How do you address the needs of individuals and families in crisis?)</p>	<p>GOAL IN STAGE 2: (How do you work with clients to maintain stability in the face of environmental barriers?)</p>	<p>GOAL IN STAGE 3: (How do you build a positive environment that nurtures individuals and promotes community success?)</p>
<p>Services Needed to Achieve Goal 1:</p>	<p>Services Needed to Achieve Goal 2:</p>	<p>Services Needed to Achieve Goal 3:</p>
<p>Partners and Allies: (Who else is doing this work?)</p>	<p>Partners and Allies: (Who else is doing this work?)</p>	<p>Partners and Allies: (Who else is doing this work?)</p>



SAMPLE CONTINUUM

Mutual Assistance Network of Del Paso Heights:



ADDITIONAL TOOLS AND USES

In addition to using these resources with your staff and volunteers, consider reviewing the case studies with existing or new partners in order to discuss shared values and potential aspects of your partnership together.

You can build staff teams that consist of members from each organizational partner in order to develop stronger ties between groups and allow for leadership experiences at all levels of your staff.

An additional exercise that can be useful when beginning a new partnership or considering expanding an existing relationship is the Sharing Values exercise, which can be found at:

www.buildingmovement.org/pdf/Sharing_Values.pdf.

This tool can be used to explore what is important to each of you, and what values need to be shared in order to move ahead.

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