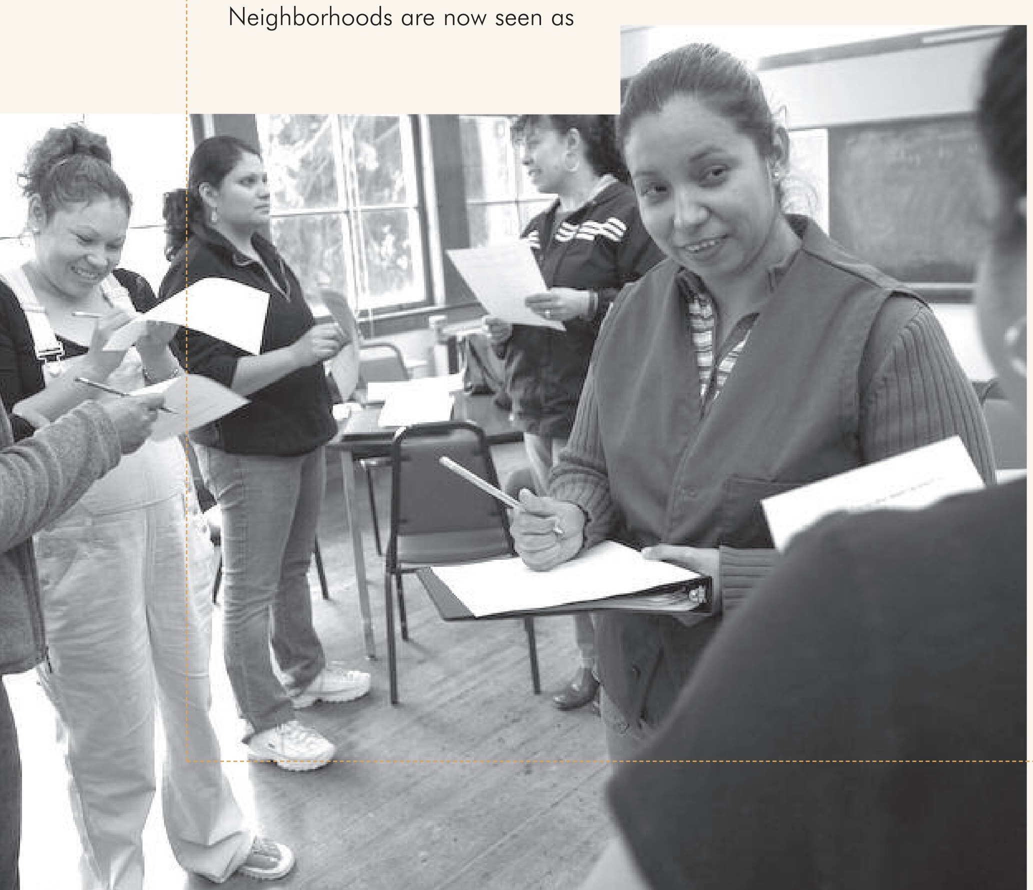
MEASURING AUTHENTIC DEMAND

Advancing better ways to measure and assess what Authentic Demand looks like on the ground when community members are truly engaged in a result-focused, resident-centered change agenda is a critical part of the Foundation's Authentic Demand framework. Absent sound indicators and criteria, it will be difficult to develop strategies for and secure investment in this core capacity for durable community change.

Assessing Authentic Demand is not only about measuring what residents and community partners do, but also what they get. This includes job placements, opportunities to advance skills and increase income, as well as access to free tax preparation, child care, and transportation. Similarly, there are benefits accruing at the community level. More children are reading at grade level. Perceptions within and outside the community may change. Neighborhoods are now seen as good places to raise children, open new businesses, recruit employees, or offer competitive and fair market financial products. Service providers benefit from more effective and efficient outreach and retention, and better results.

The Authentic Demand framework also pays attention to assessing the less tangible but no less important transformative benefits of genuine engagement for residents and their families. These include the positive social impact of parents engaged in their children's schools, youth volunteering in their neighborhoods, the social capital that's generated when neighbors share resources with each other, and the increase in service delivery and effectiveness when government and social agencies view families as customers or partners, not clients.



DATA AS A TOOL IN THE COMMUNITY CHANGE PROCESS

In all community change initiatives, there are tensions that arise as some actors place emphasis on the measurement or documentation of hard results, while others wish to measure processes and process outcomes. For some, the most important outcomes to track are those that measure or document changes in the well-being of children, families, and neighborhoods; for example, positive changes in employment and income, asset accumulation, children's health and success in school. For others, the most important focus of community change is the development of skills, capacities, and relationships that are the basis for implementing activities and tracking changes in civic engagement, systems of accountability, and influence.

Authentic Demand describes a bundle of approaches, processes, and outcomes that are essential to achieving both results and sustainability. Process documentation is a tool or set of tools that communities can use to un-bundle and define these approaches. Process documentation allows communities to examine approaches, ask questions, study their effectiveness, and periodically re-bundle their approaches to acknowledge the increasingly complex relationships within and across community organizations, systems, outcomes, and results.

Typically, this is an iterative and reflective process. Some initial framing data are collected to address a particular aspect of the work; community partners review the data and ask questions that urge follow-up inquiries and so on. Over time, communities can begin to put the puzzle pieces together and raise higher-order questions about community-level efficacy and the systems of accountability they are putting in place.

There are many places that sites can begin approaching this deliberately and purposefully, and the mapping and theory-of-change exercises provide a basis for generating process questions. *Making Connections* has identified several potential starting points that are common across the sites. These may provide a basis for developing and using tools in a cross-site peer learning exchange. The following are two examples of starting points.

Mapping resident representation at the community and systems levels. Most simply, this might include a directory or spreadsheet that summarizes:

1. Key tables at the community, city, and county levels where decisions that affect neighborhood residents are made.

2. Name of the community representatives at each table.

3. Functions of the tables, particularly the outcomes they seek to affect or influence.

4. How constituencies are defined—e.g., by geography, population, or subpopulation groups.

This snapshot of representation can be used by the community to begin the assessment. It can be used, for example, to identify gaps where community voice is missing at the table, and to stimulate debate on which type of participation is best. These sorts of discussions will raise questions about leadership transition and constituencies—that is, how leaders take information from the tables back to neighborhood residents so they can weigh in with resident perspectives, experiences, and insights. They also inform the relationships of community-based organizations to systems-level decision-making processes, among others that will inform the next generation of strategy development and data collection activities.

Mapping strategic networks. As noted in an earlier section of this guide, all sites have developed a cadre of committed and hard-working residents who provide community outreach and recruit residents to a range of services and supports. Although they go by different names—Trusted Advocates, ambassadors, and messengers—their key functions are similar. Typically, they carry out their work on a one-to-one basis or with small groups. And as the work grows, so do the demands on outreach workers' time, limiting the number of contacts and connections they can make.

Networks are a very scalable form of representation and information flow in communities, which do not sacrifice the importance of personal contact and relationships. For this reason, a number of sites are exploring how network principles and practice can be applied to improve the level, quality, and flow of information, inspiration, and support throughout the community.

As these approaches are implemented, there is a need to look at the process; to assess the structure of the network, what the value propositions are, how information flows, what the members do, the goals of the network, and how they are linked to local theories of change and to outcomes. It's also important to try and assess approaches to managing the network in a way that supports creativity and initiative among members but is not so loose that it lacks definition or value.

There is an array of evaluation and diagnostic tools available to help sites, including Geographical Information System (GIS) mapping to show geographic clusters of networks or outreach activities, and specialized software that can visually display the relationships, or flow of information or other resources, among individuals and networks, organizations, and systems, using data collected from surveys of members. These tools are fairly simple for small groups to use and implement but can be fairly labor intensive when the number of actors is large. They are useful for testing assumptions about the effectiveness and reach of strategies, and they can also inform the next generation of strategy development and data collection activities.

PUTTING IT ALL TOGETHER: DEVELOPING A PLAN FOR COLLECTING AND USING DATA

Once sites have identified the key outcomes and indicators they want to use to track progress, and the processes they want to monitor, the next step is to develop a data collection plan. Evaluators may want to take the lead on drafting a plan, but it's critical that the plan be discussed with residents and other key stakeholders to ensure that it meets their learning and evaluation needs, and that implementation, particularly if it involves them, is feasible and practical.

To complete a data collection plan, teams must answer the following questions for each outcome/indicator:

- What outcomes, indicators, and processes are most important? Just as the work is iterative, based on community learning and changes in condition or context, the evaluation plans need flexibility to adjust accordingly. For this reason (and to focus the planning), it is suggested that the initial evaluation plan focus on the two anchor points—the long term (that to which community partners are committed), and the short term (what's important now). The evaluation plan should be routinely revisited to assess its usefulness and relevance to the work.

- What is the sampling plan? To answer this question, the team must be clear about who or what the indicator is targeting. In the case of outcome indicators, this means defining who the community expects to reach or engage as a result of its activities. This could be a particular segment of the population, a particular number of people who voluntarily became engaged, a particular organization or set of organizations, external actors, and so on. In the case of process documentation, this could be a particular set of community organizations or systems partners, resident leaders, network members, network managers or weavers, or key community meetings and events.

- What are the existing sources of data? Are these sources adequate to meet the learning and evaluation goals? What modifications or additional sources of information are needed? What interview protocol and other data collection instruments might the community need to create? How are other sites handling this? Is there value in developing common instruments that all sites can use or adapt? Who will be responsible for seeing that this gets done?

- What methods will be used to collect data? There are a range of methods of data collection. Decisions must be made to determine which are most appropriate to answer the learning and evaluation questions, and whether the methods are feasible. Are there sufficient human, technical, and financial resources to implement them? These include: individual, organizational, or group surveys (in-person, phone, web-based); administrative data (American Community Survey data, program records); focus groups; GIS mapping; network analysis; observations; and document review.

- What training, technical assistance, or support will be needed to develop and implement the data collection strategies? Who is responsible for identifying this assistance or support locally and/or contacting the evaluation liaison to identify these needs and see that they are addressed?

- Who will collect the data? Evaluators may be responsible for collecting some of the data, but a main part of the job will entail training, monitoring, and supporting others in its collection. These others could include resident leaders, network weavers, organizational partners, diarists, communications specialists, and others. To make this happen, expectations must be reasonable, given competing demands on time; roles and procedures must be clearly defined and agreed to; and time and attention must be dedicated to communications and relationship-building.

- What is the timeline for collecting data? Given all that is going on in the sites, experience has shown that without a timeline, implementation of data collection plans can too easily fall off the radar. This is especially true in the early stages, before the value of the data to the site and community partners has been demonstrated. Certain forms of data should be shared routinely for purposes of reflection. Others need accountability timelines to ensure that the team is fulfilling its commitment to community partners and the initiative. This means someone, or some group, must be responsible for making sure that all trains are running on time and, when there are problems, that these are shared with community partners in order to reach resolution.

- **How will the data be analyzed and interpreted?** Who will be responsible for seeing that whatever data are collected are processed and used? Answers to these questions will likely vary across sites. Evaluation specialists can do a lot of the nitty-gritty background work; running analyses, constructing tables, and writing briefs. However, it's critical that community partners engage in the interpretation of the data—its meaning; what it says about the effectiveness of their strategies and activities; what else they would like to know about; and how the data may be used for purposes of testing assumptions, learning and improvement, advocacy/influence, accountability, and celebration. The capacity of the community to use data in these ways, and to incorporate the data into the routine of doing business, should be supported, nurtured, and honored at every step along the way.

- **How will the data be integrated—across methods and strategies, and over time?** Authentic Demand seeks to change the community environment by creating a wide range of opportunities for those who live, work, and worship there. It seeks to develop ties among residents, to encourage active participation in efforts to achieve individual and collective goals, and to leverage external resources. As the examples throughout the guide show, in any given community this is occurring in multiple venues, through a variety of approaches, to achieve multiple ends. Evaluation also seeks to demonstrate the linkages between Authentic Demand, development of sustainable accountability systems, and measurable improvement in well-being for children, families, and neighborhoods. This requires another level of theory-building, analysis, and perhaps data collection. Each site should consider who or what group might best carry this out locally, and participate in regularly scheduled cross-site phone meetings with national evaluators to plan these tasks.