

Lessons Learned from the Evaluation of Communities of Opportunity with High Applicability to HOPE SF

1) Multi-faceted community change initiatives require a clear structure for sustained implementation that effectively links and coordinates the work of different stakeholders.

COO lacked a mechanism for connecting three levels of governance (1. across public agencies first through a steering committee of department heads and then through the IAC; 2. between philanthropy and the mayor's office through a foundation advisory committee, and 3. among community members through a diffuse set of Resident Action Teams) together in a cohesive manner. A more unifying governance strategy could: support the creation of a common agenda across stakeholders; improve communications, trust, and positive working relationships among partners; enhance the responsiveness and effectiveness of city agencies to community needs; promote decision-making that is deliberative, transparent, and accountable; and cultivate political will that can be sustained over time and across administrations.

2) Managing the complexities of implementation is tough and requires adequate staffing.

The original COO 2006 business plan called for 6.8 FTE positions to manage implementation. Only two staff members were responsible for a wide range of efforts including coordinating system reform across multiple service systems, raising funds, designing and coordinating nonprofit service delivery and capacity building efforts, representing the Mayor, and engaging with community residents, neighborhood leaders, and elected officials.

3) Ambitious government-led initiatives cannot be accomplished without effective collaboration among city departments and agencies, but such collaboration is difficult without sustained attention from the Mayor.

Most stakeholders agreed that an interagency planning body was necessary to get the work done, and that the IAC made important progress in this area. However, the IAC made less progress than it might have because coordination was never completely "operationalized." A majority of those interviewed on this point attributed limited progress to a lack of full mayoral attention and backing. One person voiced the opinion that only the mayor could have overcome departmental resistance to a broader collaboration agenda, given very real barriers.

4) Maintaining foundation commitment over time is challenging, particularly when funders become concerned about diminishing political will.

A recurring theme in COO feedback is the importance of sustained, high-level political attention. Funders perceived that COO was less likely to be successful without the mayor's focus on this initiative, and many were less inclined to commit funds after the first 24 months due to a growing lack of confidence in mayoral attention.

5) Scenario planning is an important tool for expectations management. Through scenario planning, initiative goals can be aligned with available resources.

Given the fact that the level of investment over time isn't entirely predictable, scenario planning could have been used to make adjustments concerning how to spend the funds. By having plans for what to do with lower funding levels, there is less risk of funders and other stakeholders losing confidence in the direction of the initiative.

6) Balancing the need to generate momentum with the importance of managing stakeholder expectations is a difficult but necessary task for community change.

The launch of COO had been designed to be highly visible and generate significant attention in order to build momentum with the community and attract resources to support the work. Disillusionment among stakeholders set in when COO fell short of the ambitious goals articulated in the launch phase. Disillusionment, in turn, undermined implementation and fundraising efforts.

Lessons Learned from the Evaluation of Communities of Opportunity with High Applicability to HOPE SF

7) Engaging residents successfully requires that they be partners in both envisioning and implementing change. To fulfill these roles, residents need support and training.

COO leaders recognized the need for resident involvement in the initiative, and worked hard to engage residents during planning and implementation. Hiring residents to do the work of COO was a positive aspect of the initiative, but nonprofit leaders as well as some of the resident leaders interviewed felt that residents weren't sufficiently trained for their roles.

8) Building the capacity of local nonprofits is critical and requires sufficient resources along with a targeted strategy to be successful.

Nonprofit capacity-building is a very challenging issue to address. The NBO Institute was not enough. To most effectively build capacity, it is necessary to develop customized approaches to building organizational and human capacity. A differentiated approach will be able to take into account the unique capacity issues faced by individual organizations.

Discussion Questions: Leveraging Learnings from COO for HOPE SF

1. Governance

- Is the current structure sufficient to support sustained and effective implementation across teams and over time?
 - What mechanisms exist for communicating and coordinating work across teams?
 - Are there aspects of the division of labor among the key HOPE SF teams that require additional clarity? If so, what are these?
- How well are current structures enabling key City agencies to commit to and collaborate with HOPE SF?
 - What is the best way to leverage full participation, commitment of resources, and follow-through by City agencies?

2. Initiative Staffing and Management

- How well do current staffing levels match HOPE SF implementation requirements?
- Are there key areas that require increased support and attention?
- Are there ways to streamline HOPE SF management in a way that makes coordination less burdensome to the key teams?

3. Political Will

- Is it feasible to expect sustained mayoral commitment to HOPE SF?
- What are some possible strategies for building and maintaining political will over time?
- Alternatively, what are some possible strategies for lessening the dependence of HOPE SF on sustained political attention and will?

4. Managing Expectations

- Are there ways in which HOPE SF might be setting expectations too high? If so, what are these?
- Could scenario planning be a useful tool for HOPE SF?

5. Nonprofit and Resident Capacity

- How is HOPE SF approaching nonprofit and resident capacity building issues?
- How well do current resources for this work match initiative needs?
- Where is this work best positioned for success?