

**City Heights (San Diego) Building Healthy Communities (BHC) Effort  
Preliminary Evaluation Summary  
March 22, 2010**

**Overview**

This document summarizes the evaluation team’s findings from 10 interviews conducted in-person on December 2 and by telephone thereafter until December 11<sup>1</sup>, as well as from a review of written documents. Three interviewees selected as part of the original sample were unable to participate. The people interviewed included the City Heights BHC Collaborative coordinator, residents, and Collaborative members who represent the school, health, human, education, and community environment systems. These individuals were selected by the Collaborative coordinator and Community Science Evaluation Liaison to ensure an equal distribution of people across these systems. It is important to note that while the interviewees worked within the five systems, they were not necessarily leaders of these systems.

This summary only includes findings that were verified by three independent sources unless otherwise noted. These rules of evidence are used to show verifiable patterns among sources of information and treat all sources equally. The findings reflect the Community Collaborative’s planning efforts as of December 2009.

**Summary of Key Findings and Issues**

Through the planning process, the collaborative has brought together a wide variety of individuals and groups (e.g., agencies, community organizations, funders, and residents) interested in improving the health and well-being of City Heights. In general, participants had both positive and negative perceptions of the planning process. To date the collaborative has solidified a governance structure and decision-making process; facilitated networking and relationship building; established trust; fostered a spirit of collaboration among individuals, agencies, and groups involved; as well as mobilized resident leaders and conducted house meetings in which residents identified their needs, interests, and priorities related to the health of their community.

While the group has had extensive dialogue and laid the groundwork for developing a plan, some interviewees suggested that planning has yet to begin. Several people noted that the planning process has been “delayed” for several reasons described later. Many feared that this “delay” has resulted in a loss of momentum in planning and will make it difficult to retain residents’ interest in the process. Interview participants also identified challenges with the

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<sup>1</sup> Two interviews were scheduled to be conducted on December 31, 2009; however, the interviewees could not be reached at the time of the interview.

coordination of communication and logistics across the multiple components of the Collaborative. Others reported challenges with unclear expectations and mixed messages from The Endowment, and feeling the “growing pains” of being part of a groundbreaking strategic effort like BHC.

## **Accomplishments**

According to more than half of interviewees, the collaborative has:

- Mobilized resident leaders to conduct 105 house meetings that were used to solicit input from 1,550 residents in 13 different languages; and
- Fostered networking as well as relationship and trust building among members of the Collaborative, many of whom had never worked together before.

Other accomplishments mentioned by one or two individuals included:

- Increased knowledge and awareness of BHC and the community change process;
- Within a short period, created a collaborative structure that reflected members’ interests and aligned with the 10 Outcomes; and
- Provided language interpretation for Collaborative meetings.

## **Planning and Decision-making**

The Community Collaborative was integrated into the existing structure of the lead agency, Mid City CAN (MCC), a community advocacy network serving City Heights and surrounding neighborhoods. The BHC Collaborative is governed by the MCC Coordinating Council, a 17-member board composed of agency and organization representatives and residents. The Coordinating Council, which is selected by community election annually, provides leadership and oversight for the Collaborative and ensures its goals are met. Some specific duties include monitoring the budget, contracting consultants, coordinating logistics and communication, and facilitating meetings. A smaller subcommittee works closely with MCC and is more involved in decisions related to the day-to-day management of the BHC activities. The Collaborative also includes self-directed momentum teams for each of the Four Big Results. Two additional momentum teams were created for residents and to focus on outcomes related to the built environment. Momentum teams are coordinated and led by co-chairs. Eight resource teams provide technical support and resources to the Collaborative across a broad range of areas and topics (i.e., evaluation, legal, youth, communication/marketing and technology, conflict resolution, and seniors.) Representatives from the Coordinating Council and the momentum and resources teams come together monthly for “All-team” meetings to communicate across groups/teams, plan, and make decisions. Within the BHC Collaborative, decisions are made using a consensus model.

Almost half of interviewees believed that the Collaborative structure worked well. They praised the lead agency for doing a good job in coordinating activities and leading the Collaborative. Participants also felt that it was especially helpful that the lead agency already had an established structure that could be adapted for the BHC effort. Even so, participants identified two challenges with the Collaborative structure:

- Several people believed the structure was very complex with too many “moving parts,” making it difficult to coordinate communication across all the various components of the Collaborative (e.g., momentum teams, coordinating council, resource teams, etc.); and
- Interviewees also suggested that the structure was “fluid” (i.e. loose), which made it difficult to know how to engage people interested in becoming involved.

More than two-thirds of respondents reported that the Collaborative had lost momentum with the planning process due to unproductive meetings and a delay in planning. While there have been several intensive general Collaborative and momentum team meetings, most participants suggested that the planning efforts had not moved beyond conversation. According to one Collaborative member, very little progress had been made in developing a plan and the group was “... just marking time.” There was consensus among interviewees that the Collaborative was ready to move from “talking” about planning, to “actually” planning.

Participants reported that the delay in planning has forced the Collaborative into a “holding pattern.” There were mixed perceptions about why the planning process was put on hold, including: 1) waiting for the data collected from residents to be analyzed; 2) waiting for The Endowment to provide the guidelines and instructions needed to begin logic modeling; and 3) stopping and allowing time to hire facilitators to help the momentum teams plan more effectively.

### **Community and Youth Engagement**

The majority of interviewees identified the Collaborative’s community and youth engagement efforts as a major accomplishment. As previously noted the Collaborative was able to gather input from over 1,500 residents of City Heights using resident-led house meetings. Fifty percent of interviewees indicated that the house meetings gave residents the opportunity to inform the Collaborative and the Endowment of their needs and priorities. In the fall, the Collaborative held an open house designed to engage house meeting participants in other areas of the Collaborative and BHC activities; however, some interviewees thought that the event was unsuccessful because it did not generate interest in long-term involvement in BHC as expected.

Although some residents participate on momentum teams, the Coordinating Council, and in the All team meetings, interviewees indicated that resident attendance at these meeting was low.

In general, interviewees agreed that residents have been engaged in BHC primarily through the house meetings. Yet, because there has not been an outreach to residents since the house

meetings (at the time of the site visit), some people felt that the Collaborative missed an opportunity to retain the residents' interest and engagement. The Collaborative recently established a momentum team for residents who participated in the house meetings and want to be "plugged in" to other activities. This momentum team will focus on Outcome No. 10.

Although there is capacity for community organizing in City Heights and San Diego (e.g. San Diego Organizing Project), half of interviewees thought that the BHC Collaborative had not used community organizing in the planning process. A small number of interviewees disagreed. They suggested that community organizing was a key strategy in the implementation of the house meetings. Despite the reported success of the house meetings, one third of interviewees suggested that the lead agency had limited capacity to organize residents to participate in the BHC effort. It is possible that interviewees' divergent opinions regarding the Collaborative's use of and capacity to organize residents are a function of their understanding of community organizing.

Almost one third of participants reported that the Collaborative needed more representation from specific racial and ethnic minority communities (e.g., East African, Middle Eastern, and Asian). Despite these opinions, other data suggests that City Heights residents from the East African and Asian communities were participated in House Meetings as well as the Coordinating Council and momentum teams.

Additionally, two interviewees noted that some of the youth currently involved in the Collaborative participate in programs run by Collaborative members and may not be youth leaders in City Heights. Almost half of interviewees thought that there was no representation from high level leaders in the education sector. Others, however, noted that while the Collaborative does not have involvement at the school district level, educational leaders such as school principals have been engaged and are active in BHC activities. Interviewees reported that the Collaborative is also missing:

- More active engagement from City Council members and city planners; and
- Representatives from faith communities and faith-based organizations.

Interviewees also felt that the involvement of systems leaders in the BHC Collaborative is dependent on the local political environment. In City Heights, some systems' leaders are believed to be partly responsible for social conditions and challenges faced by the community. Given this, their involvement in a community building effort like BHC is not necessarily perceived as positive. Also, due to the political environment, systems leaders who are perceived as allies in City Heights and want to be involved may encounter barriers to meaningful participation.

## **Policy and Systems Change**

Opinions about the level of understanding of policy and systems change within the Collaborative varied. Almost one third believed that most people understood policy and systems change as an approach to community health improvement. An equal percentage of interviewees suggested that community organizing groups had a better understanding of this approach than agencies whose expertise lies in programming and service delivery. Half of the interviewees believed that some of the people involved in the BHC effort understood policy and systems change while others did not. Others indicated that residents did not understand policy and systems change and could benefit from appropriately-tailored education and training (i.e., not too “academic”). Still, a small percentage of respondents felt it was too early to assess their understanding of policy and systems change and what The Endowment could do to support them in this area.

## **Other Challenges, Concerns, and Support Needed from The Endowment**

Interviewees identified several other challenges with the planning process, including the following:

- Fast pace of the process and limited time for planning;
- Time commitment to be involved;
- Language diversity of the community and the need for multi-lingual communication;
- Unclear communication or “mixed messages” from the lead agency and The Endowment;
- “Growing pains” that come with launching a large scale community change effort for the first time; and
- Lack of direction and clarity regarding The Endowment’s vision and expectations.

To be successful in implementation the Collaborative will need to:

- Continue to network, build relationships, and foster trust and a collaborative spirit among members;
- Address the power dynamics among its members to ensure that all voices are heard, especially residents;
- Identify culturally-appropriate method(s) for communications; and
- Remember that this type of comprehensive community change process is new and is a learning process for most of the people involved. Therefore, it will be critical when they begin implementation to build on the lessons learned during planning.

Interviewees appreciated the support of their Program Officer who was described as responsive, accessible, and an “advocate” for City Heights. Additionally, the majority of participants praised the Program Officer’s ability to provide advice and guidance while still

allowing the Collaborative freedom to make decisions. While some thought it was too early to determine what The Endowment could do better, others suggested that the foundation should:

- Be sensitive to community members perceptions' of systems leaders in making recommendations about the composition of the Collaborative;
- Recognize that despite their reputation and influence among nonprofits, they will need to build relationships and gain the residents' trust;
- Provide more information about promising approaches and best practices from other Places;
- Be consistently clear in their oral and written communication, regarding their expectations for the Places' plans; and
- Offer more guidance and direction to the Places in developing their plans.