

Connections that Work (1996 and 1997)

A Case Study in Collaboration and Capacity Building

Background

The W.K. Kellogg Foundation approached IMAGINE CHICAGO in mid-1996 about ways to assess and increase collective impact for positive youth development by its grantees in the Chicago area. The Kellogg Foundation wanted its Chicago-focused grantees to develop fruitful connections which would leverage the impact of their respective initiatives and build organizational capacity. In response, Imagine Chicago designed Connections That Work to:

- Strengthen relationships that could lead to enhanced impact and partnerships
- Share ways of valuing impact and improving communication with stakeholders and funders
- Build institutional capacity for innovation and strategic change

Throughout this initiative, Imagine Chicago worked with participants to understand what is, imagine what can be and create what will be on behalf of a more vital future for Chicago youth. Through a series of conferences, forums, and training workshops, the process helped build shared visions, creating and strengthening partnerships, and deepening institutional capacity to innovate.

Key Program Elements

Imagine Chicago devised and implemented Connections That Work in collaboration with representatives from the Weatherhead School of Management at Case Western Reserve University, a volunteer design team of seasoned non-profit executives in Chicago and the Seabury Foundation. The Seabury Foundation, a family foundation with interests in Chicago and Michigan, wanted to build a relationship with the Kellogg Foundation and to investigate strategies for institutional collaboration. They underscored their interest by providing a small grant to expand the program to include a training

workshop on Appreciative Inquiry, a vision-focused organizing methodology widely used by IMAGINE CHICAGO in its community outreach work.

The design team, in conversation with Kellogg grantees, decided the initiative would be more significant if it included other participants with whom the grantees wanted to be in greater dialogue. With Kellogg grant recipients from the area as a core group, the initiative branched out to include others whose interest in and contribution to the youth of the city was significant. Imagine Chicago initiated a process to engage educators, health care professionals, researchers, representatives of government agencies and the business sector, spiritual leaders, social activists, parents and young people in a broad "future search" effort to review and renew the city's commitment to its young. The variety of agencies, organizations, and individuals devoted to the common goal of developing youth was extensive. Hence, to the initial focus on Kellogg grant recipients was added a larger and broader agenda, encompassing the city as a whole and its various resources committed to youth development.

The four central program components were:

1. Initial interviews with 20 Kellogg grant recipients in Chicago in order to understand their work, and to produce a directory that would be useful to potential collaborators. These interviews were conducted by members of Connections That Work volunteer design team. The interviews both produced a valuable product (a directory) and put "into the air" a set of reflection questions that helped organizations think about the impact of their organizations and how it could be magnified. The interview highlights were summarized in a profile directory provided to all grantees in a meeting of the Kellogg grantees in early February. At this meeting, they met each other, learned about each other's work, and were introduced to the various components of Connections That Work.

The interview protocol began the process of valuing organizational impact and having organizations reflect on how their vision and mission in Chicago might be expanded

through new connections. This was a very thoughtful process and conversations often extended into many hours. Those reflections were summarized in a way which helped others value the difference each organization was making, and provide inspiring "food for thought" to others. A copy of the interview protocol can be found as Appendix II at the end of this case study.

2. A lunch with Rebecca Blank, recently appointed to the Council of Economic Advisors and a leading expert on welfare reform and public policy. This meeting was held in response to the stated interest of many grantees in the impact of welfare reform and what non-profit organizations could do effectively to help shape public policy. This was a very fruitful though not especially well attended conversation. Those who came said they "wished others in their organization had joined them" for what proved to be an excellent conversation about the opportunities and limits of public policy formation to improve the lives of those living in poverty.

3. A Future Search conference (held April 16-18, 1997), in which 80 key stakeholders and representatives representing a broad spectrum of the economic and social system in Chicago met to develop a shared vision of the needs of children; to explore positive ways of valuing children, families, and communities; and to develop creative methods of assessing organizational impact on child development.

4. An Appreciative Inquiry workshop (held June 12-13, 1997) designed to help the 33 participants develop constructive organizational strategies for envisioning a desired future and translating those images of possibility into practice.

Each had embedded evaluations. An overall evaluation was also conducted with extensive participant interviews.

Future Search Conference Results: APRIL 16-18, 1997

Eighty people representing city-wide agencies, education, government, business, youth development, religious organizations, research institutions, health care, and funders, gathered for a 2-1/2 day visioning and action planning

conference organized by IMAGINE CHICAGO. The conference focus was: *Scaling Up our Impact on Chicago's Future; How to Create and Sustain Vital Communities for Children.*

The conference attempted to bring the "whole system" of Chicago into one room to discover common ground and map out collaborative action. Participants created a shared vision of the needs of children in Chicago, common hopes for a more positive future, and ways organizational impact could be expanded through new collaborations.

The Future Search process identified these "megatrends" :

- Paradigm shift from "fixing" by external interventions to development/capacity building of youth
 - requires family and community development efforts,
 - requires partnerships and collaborations across sectors.
- Mediating institutions in transition
 - traditional institutions (schools, government, churches, families, business, media, funding providers) still trying to extricate themselves from old paradigms.
 - loss of traditional power. What is new purpose?
- Changing family structures
 - children having children,
 - grandparents raising children,
 - non-traditional family structures,
 - one-parent families,
 - stories told by commercial sector, not family and church.
- Media's increasing influence on children:
Role changing from selling cereals to kids to reporting on child abuse, violence, sex, drugs (and children participating in same) and targeting children as significant consumers.
- Loss of structure for children
 - no coherent sense of meaning,
 - increasing social isolation,

- lack of transference of value,
- loss of clear boundaries (what's good, what's bad, etc., lack of positive role models).
- Community Safety
 - Physical Emotion
 - Housing, family stress.
 - Schools, image of teens as "bad kids".
 - Health care/access sense of hopelessness for the future.
 - Basic needs (food, clothing, shelter).
 - Racism.
 - Integrating children with disabilities.
- Redefinition of what education means
 - developing children, not fixing (seeing children as own experts)
 - defining new standards
 - involvement and service - volunteerism,
 - institutional standards,
 - teacher professionalism,
 - changing image (kids, teachers, etc.).
 - new knowledge
 - technology,
 - research in learning,
 - hazards of "over programming" children.

Additional Issues / Goals

- Jobs
- 100% voting
- Safety - children cannot learn with "bullets flying"
- Environmental health
- Family support
- Justice/fairness
- Equitable school funding/learning opportunities Racial togetherness
- Mentors/role models for all children who need them.

Visions and Goals for the Future which Emerged

The following ideas were generated and work groups organized by voluntary task forces of different organizations represented at the conference:

1. Create a "Children's Bill of Right's", involving children from throughout Chicago in a year-long bottoms-up process, leading to a 1998 conference to draft a "Children's Bill of Rights".
2. Create a structure for a "collaborative community/Urban Villages", which include all of the organizations and individuals needed for children to have the support systems they need to grow to productive adults (health, schools, education, parks, universities, and businesses).
3. Create a citywide partnership for quality learning opportunities.
4. Accelerate the paradigm shift - making children partners and leaders and recognizing their potential.
5. Create a neighborhood health care initiative on the West side.
6. Create an "Urban Village" arts program with cultural community workers working in local parks to help people express through performing and visual arts their images of Chicago's future (Urban Gateway's, Imagine Chicago, Pegasus Players, HUD Cultural Center).
7. Create a weekly forum (40,000 kids) at United Center to focus on inspiring messages for youth - and tie to local community gatherings that build vital connection to mentors/jobs.

Participants came away convinced that leveraging impact requires collaborative action planning and that Chicago needs safe, healthy neighborhoods for children, well-supported families, and new configurations of networked organizations.

Different groups set times to meet and start more comprehensive planning. With funding from the Seabury Foundation and the W.K. Kellogg Foundation, Connections that Work continued throughout 1997 to provide bi-monthly forums on topics of common interest to Kellogg grantees and others.

The Appreciative Inquiry Seminar -- June 13-14, 1997

Appreciative inquiry (AI) is a method for discovering, understanding and fostering innovations in organizations through the gathering of positive stories and images and the construction of positive interactions. AI seeks out the very best of "what is" to help ignite the collective imagination of "what could be." The aim is to generate new knowledge which expands the "realm of the possible" and helps members of an organization envision a collectively desired future and to carry forth that vision in ways which successfully translates images of possibility into reality and beliefs into practice.

Thirty-three Kellogg grantees and other representatives from other organizations including schools, business, religious institutions, and community agencies attended the Appreciative Inquiry training seminar which took place at the Chicago Metropolitan Club at Sears Tower. The two-day seminar's goal was to introduce attendees to the Appreciative Inquiry methodology, provide practical exercises to help participants understand and use appreciative inquiry as a planning tool and to train attendees to teach the appreciative inquiry model. This was fulfilled through engaging examples, stories and articles as well as group and individual activities that highlighted the effects and uses of appreciative inquiry.

Dr. David Cooperrider and Bliss Browne led the Appreciative Inquiry seminar. The feedback on the workshop was quite favorable and is attached as Appendix I. It was an opportunity for participants to learn a fresh new approach for planning and evaluating not limited to "the old problem-solving approach." The training experience was both engaging and affirming. People articulated many useful applications.

Outcomes

102 individuals participated in Connections that Work. Most Kellogg grantee organizations were brought into relationship with each other and with others in Chicago working on behalf of youth development and community health. Connections That Work proved an effective capacity building tool for Kellogg grantees including IMAGINE CHICAGO. Important outcomes included:

1. Some new connections, though few recipients cited significant new relationships. This is a longer-term activity which was set in motion. Kellogg grantees gained good contact information about and introductions to each other which facilitates ongoing collaboration.
2. Capacity-building for the organizations involved. The response to the initiative was positive because of the perceived effectiveness of the programming.
3. Interest in expanding the connections. The participants were in favor of continuing the process and the engagement, with smaller, more focused meetings and perhaps newsletters.
4. IMAGINE CHICAGO strengthened its network of organizations committed to a positive future for Chicago, and to providing youth a meaningful role in shaping that future.

Assessing the impact of the overall initiative was complicated by its breadth. Summaries of conference feedback and evaluation returned long lists of positive and helpful comments, but no single direction emerged from among them and not the strengthened connections one might hope would result from a concentrated program like this.

The Future Search conference developed a shared vision of key elements in making Chicago a better place for youth, as well as a "mind map" of the current situation. Sectors represented included: Government, Religious Organizations, Foundations and Donors, Youth Agencies, Health Agencies, Non-Profit Agencies, City wide and Community based, Schools/Education, Business, Media, Juvenile Justice, Activists/Leaders, Students, as well as the Kellogg grantees. Because of the diversity of voices, visions and sectors represented, participants got to see issues and opportunities from vantage points not otherwise readily accessible. The visioning process was especially powerful for the 20 teenage members of the Chicago Children's Choir who participated. Not only was their presence inspiring, they were quite stimulated by being included as part of visioning teams,

having their opinions valued. Their presence added urgency and a reality check to the visioning process.

The outcomes of a Future Search depend on the projects and structures that conference participants identify as being of high priority to them. Though various task groups were created at the conference, there was little sustained energy to create new initiatives to move in the direction of those visions. This was partly a function of poor attendance at the final day of the session which was the "action-oriented" day. Participants were too distracted by work back at their offices to devote 2 ½ days to a conference in spite of having committed to do so and felt overcommitted to existing collaborations. Participants were also disappointed that there were no Kellogg representative in attendance at the conference to share thoughts about geographic impact and programming priorities.

Conference designs which require continuous commitment should probably always be held off-site and overnight with a captive market. Though participants committed to participating throughout the 3 days of Future Search, they came and went with alacrity, checking in and out of their offices. They sent representatives in their place. The Case Western staff commented afterwards that they had never led such a difficult conference. As a result, the conference could not move effectively to action. It was probably too ambitious to try a Future Search – which relies on continuous participation - in an unformed group with no ongoing accountability to each other.

The response to the initiative was substantially positive because of effective organization of the programming:

- the meetings were well run, with good variety, good use of visuals, clear presentation of content, involvement,
- the techniques presented at Future Search and Appreciative Inquiry seminars were particularly useful,
- the materials distributed were informative and proved effective as learning tools in other contexts,
- the asset-based approach was affirming and positive,
- meeting others engaged in similar activities was encouraging and assisted in the networking process
- for those new to Chicago, it proved an extraordinary introduction to the city and how it works.

The participants wanted to continue the process and the engagement with smaller more focused meetings and perhaps newsletters. Some topics gathered as items of interest for future gatherings included:

How do you do system change in the non-profit community? How do you structure for it, partner with other agencies about staff development, with right technology and associated training?

How do you assess impact? Many organizations are struggling with how to know whether they are making a visible difference. They are accustomed to measuring activities and population served more than assessing outcomes.

What makes for effective collaboration now in Chicago? Can we profile a few of the existing larger youth collaborations and have them share "lessons learned" in establishing and maintaining effective collaborations?

How can we better understand territorial passage in the City? Children grow up in Chicago knowing territorial boundaries, i.e. where it is safe and not safe to be due to gangs. Most adults aren't even aware this exists. What is the psychological impact on kids who grow up without "safe passage?"

What are the dynamics and underlying theories of how to enable group formation? Many times youth will come to group meetings but never become part of the group. If that bonding took place, many of their conflicts could be worked out within the group.

How do we protect children's health given welfare cuts?

There were a few negative evaluations from those who felt that a "Let's make something new" mode is not as useful for most organizations as one which says, rather, "Let's keep doing what we are already doing, only more, and better." One said the program failed to adequately recognize the many collaborative projects already underway, and noted that any more would be too many.

Excellent written resource materials on both Future Search and Appreciative Inquiry had ongoing usefulness in developing organizational capacity. Conference conclusions were shared with a number of organizations and provided a key input to the Chicago team at the President's Summit on America's Promise.

Project Director's Reflection: Lessons Learned

Relationship building benefits from focus, purpose, and sustained connections. This initiative was broad-based and not task-oriented and therefore lacked priority to participants when pitted against demands of deadline-oriented tasks. That said, people genuinely appreciated the opportunity to connect with others and are impressed with the quality of projects Kellogg has funded in Chicago. They lack the opportunity to connect, even within the same university or department where people have been working on parallel initiatives without knowing it.

It is clear from the initial interviews that most organizations recognize the need for greater collaboration and their own limits in pursuing it. It is encouraging, however, that in a city which has been often territorial that agencies admit needing partners in order to be more effective. Effective collaboration for non-profits benefits from specific issue or project focus. This effort would have been easier if it had been based in a focused common task.

Using a volunteer design team was very rewarding for them and for IMAGINE CHICAGO. Design meetings provided an opportunity to share reflections on current challenges to non-profits, to establish communication between agencies who wanted to get to know each other, and to broaden the conversation about impact in the city. Simply the process of designing the interview protocol was a fruitful process. Volunteers commented that they were willing to give their time because it was a valuable personal development opportunity.

Long-distance partnerships are expensive and maintaining active communication is essential. The partnership with Case Western was incorporated because Imagine Chicago wanted to provide itself as well as other participants the opportunity to experience in-depth training with cutting edge organizational and large group development processes – in particular Future Search and Appreciative Inquiry. These workshops required us to develop good written materials about these and to experiment with their larger scale usefulness in Chicago. Case Western assigned a graduate student to Imagine Chicago's staff for the

duration of the project. That process was plagued by communication challenges.

It is worth experimenting with innovative group processes even when they prove to be difficult to apply in a given context. Imagine Chicago and other participating organizations learned a lot about large group methods, both from what worked and what did not. Those lessons have been integrated into ongoing work. Imagine Chicago, for example, deferred to the experience of Case Western with respect to the 2 ½ day design of the Future Search Conference in spite of protests from grantees that it would preclude the active involvement of the right level of representation. Having now participated in running such a conference, we would design it differently next time.

Appendix I: Conference Valuation on the AI training

Q1. What about Appreciative Consultation Workshop most enlivened you?

- meeting others from different organizations with similar commitments
- an approach for moving large systems with unlimited numbers of people
- learning that we can make progress without dissecting problems
- how people with varied backgrounds have so much in common
 - United Religions example
- theory of Appreciative Inquiry
- understand process and theory behind the process
- to see quality of "real" relationships cultivated from AI process
- impact of storytelling
- understanding connection between theory/practice of AI
- opportunity to practice AI
- that being realistic does not equal being negative
- changing ways of gaining experiences
- possibility of examining possibilities. redirecting my energy
- the theory makes sense to me. practical theory and method
- the possibility of moving to effective, positive action
- the power of this process
- a way of expressing research questions

Q 2. What excites you most about introducing Appreciative Inquiry to your organization?

- it will promote empowerment and make possible dreams, visions, goals
- sharing challenges and encouragement
- that an organization can leap over its present boundary and resolve its current conflict
- AI will give people hope
- communication is the way of mutual understanding
- personal, group and organizational growth, innovations, change and unintended outcomes

- transformational dialogue
- -ppportunity to use AI to understand one's organizational culture and do program planning
- the thought of having a large number of people in accord
- it will shift the whole atmosphere in which we address issues/change
- AI applies to all levels of life. It's great and simple to use in a classroom
- AI will help my organizations bring the best out of people rather than fix their problems
- shared inquiry
- will help draw on the strengths in our organization
- nurturing my staff. Mobilizing community outreach
- brings new hope. I am beginning to dream again
- the prospect of seeing new energy, commitment, effectiveness
- I connected with my dream to start "The Midwest Center of Race and Gender"
- ability to unite people and bring creative change

Q 3. What consultation competencies have you discovered that you already have?

- to include positive thought in my organization
- resonating with people's excitement
- looking for solutions not problems
- thinking positively about people
- listening skills
- organizing/understanding people
- capacity to ask and develop questions
- ability to set the stage
- love of words and searching for fine meanings
- understanding theory: positive image-positive action
- my ability to see the positive, to listen to others' ideas and the desire to work in groups
- AI will help me deal with individual's inner struggles
- in my family at Fathers' Day
- am able to listen and be inquisitive
- a core attitude about how the world works best
- I do try to be a change agent
- a knack for recognizing others' gifts and contributions

- giving hope to others
- appreciative listening
- focus on positive reality and dreams

Q 4. In what context will you apply what you have learned?

- my school
- family, church (x2), at work
- not sure at this time
- group counseling
- development of an Asian Pastoral Plan in the context of the Archdiocese and their countries of origin. I need your assistance
- to develop an assets based approach to needs assessment and community building
- use AI to understand what makes and sustains community partnerships
- to develop an evaluation strategy for a leadership project
- in all facets of my life -home, work and community
- with my children, spouse, co-workers
- gather stories of organizations as basis for rejuvenating humanity and engagement
- my family life: what was the happiest time you remember?
- at work. I expect to increase productivity in my group
- would use AI with my staff for a growth strategy
- personal life. parish, at work
- want to use it with staff. May be getting my Ph.D. in this area
- my extended family, faculty who are interested
- in a workshop I will do in two weeks
- in my young organization

Q 5. Suggestions for taking this training to a new level?

- meet again with plans or result of projects already in action
- join others in bringing AI to new groups
- plan a time for this group to come together again in a year
- bring AI to corporate organizations, research and planning offices
- bring youth organizations in the city
- thank you for this golden opportunity to better myself!

- use this technique to develop programs and evaluation strategies
- having family sessions to address love, unity and inter-generational growth
- do a half day additional training seminar
- more detail on dream, design and destiny steps, need practical outlines of AI
- use survey to determine how AI was used and share results widely
- Web site with info and bibliography.
- a newsletter of success stories
- documentation, research. -loved storytelling
- weekend workshop which brings teams from organizations or facilitate pairings who want to collaborate on projects
- like to get more on the 4D process
- conduct workshop in various languages
- follow-up workshop based on stories that come after this workshop

Appendix II: Appreciative Inquiry Protocol used to interview Chicago-based Kellogg grantees

Name_____

Organization_____

Date_____

Interviewer_____

Introduction: I'm here as part of an IMAGINE CHICAGO project supported by the Kellogg Foundation called Connections that Work.

The overall purpose of today's interview is to begin to understand the particular components that contribute to the impact of your organization -- as part of a project to develop ways to magnify this impact through creative connections with other organizations and individuals you see as vital to a healthy future for Chicago youth

Connections that Work will provide an unusual opportunity for Kellogg grantees in Chicago to:

- learn from each other's work
- think about institutional impact and how best to communicate it to multiple constituencies including funders
- design and develop a collective vision of a vital future for Chicago youth in partnership with those who are key beneficiaries and can make it happen
- imagine ways you can extend the impact of your most important initiatives through connections with other organizations
- work with leading practitioners in organizational development to develop effective organizational strategies for sustaining connections and implementing an expanded vision

We hope today to get your ideas on what would make this a worthwhile process from your point of view.

To start, I'd like to learn a little bit about who you are, what larger vision drew you to work in this organization? What was your particular passion when you arrived here?

A. "High Point" personal story

As you reflect on your life and work, I expect you've experienced great disappointments and moments you know you've made a real difference. For the moment I would like you to recall a real "high point" - a time when you were involved in something with high impact in which you felt especially alive, effective, engaged.

1. Please describe this high point experience.
2. What made it especially fulfilling?
3. What lessons from it do you carry with you into the work you are now doing?

B. Valuing: There are many qualities and skills, resources, trends, and historical experiences that can be drawn upon to create connections that make a difference. We would like to engage you in valuing those many resources at several different levels – in yourself, your organization and trends that support the development of local community, youth and leadership work in Chicago.

1. Yourself:

Without being too humble, what is it that you value most about yourself as it relates to things you bring to the work of your organization and the broader work of youth and community development in Chicago?

What are your best qualities, skills, approaches, experiences, etc?

C. ORGANIZATIONAL HIGH POINT

We'd like to understand something you consider to be an organizational "high point", an impact of which you're especially proud. As you think of the many ways your organization is positively impacting youth (or community health) development in Chicago, what stands out for you as a time the organization

made an exceptional difference, had an impact beyond your highest hopes?

1. What were you able to accomplish?
2. Who were/are the key beneficiaries of your work?
3. What were some of the unique capabilities/approaches of your organization that enabled the project to accomplish its objectives?
4. What positive trends in the community/city contributed to the initiative's success?
5. What helpful aspects of your relationship with other partners contributed to the project's success?
6. What ways were others able to learn from what you accomplished and leverage your experience?

D. VISION

1. What is your organization working towards?
2. If you accomplished those goals most important to your organization, what would be different?

E. EXPANDING IMPACT

1. We're constantly being asked as non-profits what we've really accomplished. What criteria do you use for assessing your organization's impact in Chicago?
2. Who do you think best understands the impact your organization is having (on youth and leadership development) in Chicago?
3. Beyond the competencies you've already articulated, are there other organizational strengths, competencies that enable your organization to make a positive difference in Chicago?

F. FUNDER CONNECTIONS

1. What do you find especially helpful about your funding relationships now?

2. What could make the relationships even more productive?

G. CONNECTIONS WITH OTHERS

1. What would it take to really scale up your organization's impact significantly?
2. How might participating in a collective visioning process with other key stakeholders in youth development influence the direction you set?
3. Who specifically would you most want to participate with you in such a process -- the people you think have the most vital interest in, influence on and stake in the future of youth in this city...

What youth? _____

What religious leaders? _____

What educators? _____

What business leaders? _____

What policy makers? _____

Others? _____

We would like to include these people in our Future Search conference in April (set for April 17-18-19)

Next steps: The perspectives of all those participating in the interviews will be shared in a joint meeting on FEBRUARY 12 to which all organizations will be invited and which will launch a series of opportunities to make connections with others committed to youth and community health in Chicago.

THANK YOU!!!