

Engaging New Leadership Voices



for Catalyzing  
and Sustaining  
Community Change



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The report would not have been possible without the people interviewed -- those who are working to develop and support new leaders in their communities; and those new leaders themselves, who are committed to making positive change in their communities. The insights shared deepened the knowledge about what supports new leadership voices to emerge and how those voices can be sustained over time to benefit people and their communities.

## Executive Summary

Leaders make change. The kind of change that leaders make depends on who is at the table when priorities are set and decisions are made that have an impact on the social and economic well-being of individuals and communities. Too often decisions are made that have a profound impact on people's lives without including them in the decision-making process. The Kellogg Foundation is committed to changing this outcome by investing in the development of new leaders.

The Kellogg Foundation's Leadership Cross-Cutting Theme Team partnered with Development Guild/DDI, a consulting firm in Brookline, Massachusetts, to design a research project to learn how foundation initiatives and grantees are supporting the emergence of new leadership that is capable of leading change that will have a positive impact on communities. The choice to focus this project on emerging new leadership voices came about as a result of several observations.

- There is an emerging consensus among program staff at the Kellogg Foundation that successfully engaging new leadership voices, especially youth, is key to catalyzing and sustaining change.
- Knowledge about what Kellogg Foundation grantees and program directors are learning about developing and supporting the emergence of new leadership is not well-documented.
- This learning project provides WKKF program teams and grantees with an opportunity to learn from one another and to use that knowledge to improve and expand their efforts to develop emerging leaders.

We collected data by reviewing documents; conducting nearly 30 interviews with program directors, grantees, and new leaders; and holding a "program conversation" at the Foundation to which five grantees were invited to discuss how they build leadership capacity in their communities.

In this study we address the following six questions:

1. *Who are new the leadership voices for catalyzing and sustaining community change and what assets do they bring to the table?*
2. *In what venues are new leadership voices being supported and developed?*
3. *What strategies are being used to support and develop the engagement of new leadership voices?*
4. *What impacts are new leaders having?*
5. *What challenges must be addressed to effectively support and sustain new leaders?*
6. *How can foundations best support the development of emerging leaders?*

## **New Leadership Voices for Catalyzing and Sustaining Community Change**

New leadership voices committed to making a difference in communities are emerging from very different contexts and bring vastly different perspectives and experiences. The diversity of voices was continually identified as an asset in setting community priorities, and addressing community issues or problems. New leadership voices include: those who are socially and economically marginalized and who may, in the past, have been overlooked as potential leaders; those who have emerged as leaders in their communities, but may not yet be present at leadership tables where decisions are made, resources distributed and policies set that impact people in communities; and those leaders who may be visible in professional and policymaking arenas, but whose commitment to working with leaders in community is just emerging.

### **Assets of New Leadership Voices**

New voices bring many different assets to the work of catalyzing and sustaining community change, such as enthusiasm and a desire to make a difference; open-mindedness and creativity; a broadened perspective; willingness and ability to work with others who are different from them; information and expertise; and access to new resources.

## Venues for Developing New Voices

We have identified five venues through which new leadership voices are being supported and developed. Each venue reaches different audiences and develops its own approaches to leadership development depending on the outcomes it seeks. Some venues use more formal leadership development approaches, such as training programs, while others engage people in developing their leadership through assuming leadership roles in their communities; often a combination of approaches is used.

- **Educational Institutions** – Educational institutions are an important venue for developing youth leadership, often through programs that have a community service component. In recent years educational institutions have become a more important resource for community leadership development through the formation of institutes and centers that focus on building bridges between institutions and communities, sharing resources, and collaborating on projects and programs that build community leadership capacity.
- **Community Leadership Development Organizations** – Community leadership development organizations, because they are located in communities, are more responsive to local needs. These organizations provide leadership learning opportunities to groups of emerging leaders who live and work in those communities, often around a pressing issue or for a particular constituency. Through these organizations, emerging leaders develop skills, knowledge, and a network of relationships that support them in their changemaking efforts.
- **Service Organizations** – Service organizations focus on meeting personal needs of a particular population (e.g. education, job training, etc.). As these programs search for innovative ways to achieve their missions and meet the needs of those they are serving, they are engaging in leadership development. These organizations are creating opportunities for their “clients” to become active “citizens.”
- **Advocacy Organizations** – Advocacy organizations focus on changing policy, transforming fields, shaping public perceptions, developing useable knowledge, and expanding available resources around an issue or a problem. Often these organizations take an active role in developing new leadership, capable of leading campaigns for change around a social problem or issue.
- **Foundation-Sponsored Initiatives** – Many emerging leaders have been identified and supported to develop their leadership capacity through foundation-sponsored initiatives. Initiatives use different leadership development strategies to support the emergence of new leadership voices, including creating leadership opportunities, encouraging community engagement, engaging in shared learning projects, launching partnerships or commissions, and convening networking meetings.

## Strategies for Developing New Voices

### A. *Readiness*

The issue of leadership readiness is a complex one. The readiness of an individual, group, or partnership to contribute their experiences, knowledge, and skills to improving the quality of life in their communities depends on many factors. For some people there are survival issues preventing them from making this contribution, such as the lack of a job or job skills, the inability to read or write, or poor mental and/or physical health. Others face financial or logistical barriers to their participation such as lack of transportation, limited financial resources that make volunteering a hardship, or family responsibilities. Established leaders may be uncomfortable sharing power, valuing diverse perspectives, or fearful about working in a community-centered environment which differs from their professional lives. Paying attention to what needs to be in place to support new leaders to emerge will contribute significantly to expanding whose voices are heard.

### B. *Experiential Learning*

New voices, when given responsibility and opportunities to lead, develop their leadership capacity. Most programs we studied included an experiential component. Experiential learning can happen in a variety of ways such as giving people leadership positions and roles, engaging people in community projects, and providing people opportunities to come up with and implement their own ideas.

### C. *Mentoring/Coaching*

Mentoring, coaching, and other one-on-one support strategies are critical for new leadership voices to be successful. Mentoring is especially needed when people are asked to take on leadership roles and operate in an environment that may be unfamiliar to them. Our interviews indicate that, though coaching and mentoring require a considerable investment of resources, this is an important component of any successful leadership development strategy for emerging new leaders.

### D. *Skill Development*

Skill development is an outcome of every leadership development opportunity or program. The range of skills being developed varies tremendously depending on the venue for leadership development. Several areas of skill development emerged as particularly important across many venues. These included job and life skills, cultural competence, community organizing skills, and research and information gathering skills. Community leaders also need to develop process skills, such as coalition-building, resolving conflict, decision-making, facilitating, running a meeting, listening, mediating, keeping an open mind, planning, priority-setting, building relationships, self-awareness, public speaking, and visioning.

### **E. *Relationships***

Building solid relationships, based on trust and mutual respect, is at the heart of developing new leadership. We consistently heard from program participants, that one of the most valuable experiences they have had, is meeting with others who share their commitment to change. These relationships enable people to share resources, knowledge, and skills, while giving each other support to catalyze and sustain change efforts. When communities have dense relationship networks built on trust, they are more capable of working together to improve the social and economic well-being of their communities, and to accomplish more than they could acting alone.

### **F. *Knowledge and Information Development***

Several organizations and foundation-sponsored initiatives engage emerging leaders in developing new information and knowledge. The process of developing new knowledge builds skills and relationships that are valuable to the community over time. In addition, quality information, in a useable form, that addresses community priorities, is a powerful tool for making the case for change.

### **G. *Resources***

Foundations provide resources that enable nonprofit organizations to develop and expand opportunities for leadership development. Often these resources enable an organization to strengthen its programs and infrastructure to reach more people in the community. Sometimes foundation grants enable organizations to re-grant dollars to community-determined priorities. In addition to the resources that foundations provide, other important resource development strategies include training new leaders in skills such as grant writing, fundraising, and attracting government resources into the community to stimulate economic and community development which in turn creates more leadership opportunities.

## Impact of New Voices

The impact new leadership voices are having is multi-dimensional and complex. Some of these impacts are quantifiable, such as legislation or executive orders passed, new programs established, and new people in leadership positions. Other impacts are more qualitative and difficult to measure, but of equal importance for engaging and supporting the emergence of new leadership voices. These include the personal empowerment of new leaders, changes in attitudes and perspectives of existing leaders, and a community's feelings of renewed commitment and hope for creating a better future. We found seven areas of significant impact.

- Developing a leadership voice – Many people we interviewed developed confidence, knowledge, and skills that not only benefited them personally, but have transformed them into change agents working to organize others and make positive changes in their communities.
- Becoming positional leaders – Emerging leadership voices are moving into leadership positions. In some cases, these are elected positions; and in other cases, they are leadership positions in community organizations. Attaining a leadership position gives emerging leaders a platform for mobilizing others to make change.
- Challenging the thinking of existing leaders – Those who, by virtue of their position, have more power in a situation, often have not been exposed to the perspectives, ideas, and information new voices bring to the table. When new leadership voices are present in forums where existing leaders gather, they have opportunities to educate and inform the thinking of established decision-makers.
- Changing policies and institutional practices – When given the training, support, and information, those who have not had a voice in setting a policy agenda or determining how institutions will implement policies can develop an effective voice that can improve the well-being of the whole community.
- Building communities – Emerging leaders are the source of innovative and creative ideas that may have a positive impact on addressing community needs and improving the quality of life.
- Expanding resources to communities of color – New leaders have effectively mobilized at the federal level to expand the resources available to communities of color.
- Transforming fields – New leaders are transforming fields, such as bodies of knowledge and sets of practices that are embedded in, and supported by institutions. This is particularly evident in educational fields such as service learning, middle school education, health professions education and food systems education.

## Challenges for Developing New Voices

Throughout our research, we heard about some significant challenges to fully engaging new leaders, sustaining new leadership voices over time, and leveraging the full potential of the many new leadership voices emerging at the local, state, and national levels. We highlight the major challenges here in hopes that they will become the focus of future efforts to develop and support leaders to more effectively work together across boundaries.

- **Renewing and expanding new leadership voices** – Often there is some catalyst driving an organization to reach out to new voices, but there is not necessarily an on-going organizational commitment to nurturing new voices. Finding and sustaining new leadership voices requires an on-going commitment many organizations do not have the time, knowledge, resources, or desire to make.
- **Sustaining new voices** – When new voices speak, they are often advocates for change to existing systems not meeting the needs of individuals and communities. While new voices bring positive change to communities, they may also create new forms of conformity and exclusion that need to be challenged by newer leadership voices. Institutionalizing a culture of change that seeks out and supports the engagement of new leadership voices is a difficult challenge requiring community-based organizations that know how to remain innovative and supportive of change.
- **Community economic development** – Successful community economic development expands leadership opportunities in communities. To date we have found few models, among the grantees we interviewed, where the private sector has been successfully engaged with citizen-based efforts to foster economic development.
- **Spanning boundaries between existing and new leadership** – The effective engagement of new voices requires that existing leaders, who may feel threatened by new voices or lack an appreciation of what they bring to the table, be willing and capable of sharing power.
- **Institutional and political barriers** – Existing power arrangements that are often institutionalized in laws, regulations, and government and political activities, can act as significant barriers to engaging the participation of new leadership voices. Changing these laws, regulations and institutional practices can create conditions that allow new leaders to emerge, especially those who have been disadvantaged and underrepresented at decision-making tables.
- **Entrenched prejudices and inequalities** – Engaging those from traditionally “underrepresented” or marginalized communities requires addressing historically entrenched prejudices and inequalities. Racism, classism, and ableism were most often identified as presenting barriers to involving new voices in decision-making processes. Continuing to find more effective ways to move beyond prejudices and address inequality will create more opportunities for new leaders to emerge.
- **Creating integrated and layered levels of activism** – One challenge of systemic change efforts is building the capacity and infrastructure for participation and engagement at the community, state, and national levels. Sometimes there are conflicts between activists at different levels because their points of view, approaches, and priorities differ. Creating opportunities for communication, networking, and partnerships contributes to strengthening collective leadership voices for change.

## The Foundation's Role

In conversations with grantees, we asked how the Kellogg Foundation has aided their efforts to support the emergence of new leadership and what additional efforts foundations could undertake to increase grantees' impact. Following are several of the key suggestions made by grantees.

- **Financial support** – Foundations' significant resources, and accompanying ability to give sizeable grants for multiple purposes, is very valuable to grantee organizations at all stages of development and in many fields. Giving money that is flexible—not focused on a specific deliverable—and long-term is an added value. Foundations can improve their financial support by investing in long-term relationships; smaller, riskier grants to grassroots organizations; and funding organizing efforts.
- **Sustainability** – The durability of an organization over the long-term will depend on its ability to build local ownership and financial support. Foundations can help and support organizations to plan for, and build a sustainable base for the achievement of their mission, through strategies like technical support in identifying potential sources of long-term support.
- **Expertise and advice** – National foundations are able to provide expertise and technical assistance to their grantees that is invaluable. In some cases, this is as simple as foundation staff or consultants serving as neutral “outside” observers who can provide feedback. In other cases, it is more formally organized coaching or training of grantees.
- **Convening and brokering** – Because of their position, credibility, and visibility, foundations are in a unique position to be brokers between different sectors or different groups within a community. This convening power also allows foundations to bring together networks of people across communities who are doing similar work.
- **Planning and evaluation** – By supporting adequate planning phases and program evaluation, foundations support organizations to do their work better, to learn from what they are doing and to make program improvements.

## Topics for Further Study

While this study has begun to answer key questions about developing new leadership voices to catalyze and sustain community change, there remain a number of topics that could be further investigated. Following are some of the questions that merit future evaluation.

- Impact – What impact are new voices having at the individual, community, institutional, and policy level? How can new voices be better engaged and supported to have an increasing impact on each of these areas? How can the development and impact of new voices be more effectively captured and documented?
- Private sector engagement – Given that the business sector’s involvement will be crucial in community change efforts, what are effective models and strategies for engaging the private sector?
- Mitigating inter-group tensions – How can established and emerging leaders bridge differences so that they can effectively work for the common good? What strategies are effective at sustaining the engagement of leaders who come together with very diverse perspectives and experiences?
- Sustainability for new voices – How can foundations effectively support their grantees to continue engaging new voices after initiative funding ends?

For a copy of the full report, visit our website at [www.LeadshipOnline.wkkf.org](http://www.LeadshipOnline.wkkf.org)



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