

Chapter 19

Community Empowerment

Giving Communities the Power to Solve Their Own Problems

***Community Empowerment* shifts control over government decisions and responsibilities to community-based entities, such as neighborhood organizations, public housing tenants, or business associations, by creating power-sharing arrangements between them and government.**

..... **W**hen Linda Stein moved from New York City to Newbury, an idyllic small town in Vermont, she figured she'd seen the last of crime. During the past few years, though, she has spent one evening a month in Newbury's social hall deciding how to deal with local lawbreakers.

Stein and other community volunteers meet regularly with adult non-violent offenders (often drunk drivers) to decide how they should repair the damage they have done to the community. One month, they talked with someone who had driven off without paying for gas he had pumped. "We had him interview the gas station owner to find out how the crime had affected him," Stein says. Then he paid for the gas and wrote an essay about the crime's effects on other people and the potential effect on his life if he were to repeat the crime.

About 30 miles east of Newbury, in Barre, Richard Jenny spends his Wednesday mornings this way. He and several other members of the community reparative board, as the volunteer groups are called, handle two or three cases in a sitting. One, which Jenny calls "the banged-up cow story," involved a young man who, while drunk, drove into a cow that a farmer was taking across a road. The driver was cited by the police, and the farmer presented a claim for payment.



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From ***The Reinventor's Fieldbook***, by David Osborne and Peter Plastrik. ©2000 by Osborne and Plastrik

“When the offender came before us,” says Jenny, “we asked him what he thought about trying to make amends to the farmer. He felt the [farmer’s] claim was outrageous and that the accident was partly the farmer’s fault.” The offender didn’t seem very flexible about his position, so one of the board members asked if he’d be willing to go with him to talk to the farmer. The meeting occurred several days later, Jenny says, in the farmer’s barn—in front of the cow. When the farmer stated his case, he pointed out the injury and said that, as a result, the cow had to be hand-milked, which cost extra money. Because the cow was no longer economically feasible to retain, the farmer would have to sell it; and because it was injured, it was less valuable.

Then, says Jenny, the farmer and the offender talked with the community member about the situation. “They talked about how much the farmer was losing in this. Then they negotiated what would be reasonable for the young man, who didn’t have a very good job, to pay.”

Over in Bennington, Vermont, a college town, Ron Cohen remembers an intense case tackled by the board he joined in 1996. A teenage girl with an underage-drinking offense came before the group. When given an opportunity to speak, she was unresponsive, Cohen says.

There were probably lots of reasons for this. Most of us were over 40 years old, and we must have looked like 80 to her. All but one of us were men. She was embarrassed and her response sounded surly.

One of the board members, a father of two daughters, pointed a finger at the girl and insisted that she look at board members when she spoke to them. When he pressed the matter and kept pointing his finger at her, she broke into tears. After the girl left the room so the board could discuss what it wanted to do, Cohen complained angrily that she had been mistreated. The board talked about this for a while. When the girl rejoined the meeting, the finger-pointing board member apologized to her, and the board and the offender reached an agreement on her restitution. When the board ended its meeting, the girl was sitting in a hallway waiting to see someone in another office. Cohen remembers what happened next:

There was one woman on the board, a retired kindergarten teacher. She went up to the girl and said, “How are you doing?” The kid just nodded her head. Then the woman said, “You look like you could use a hug.” The kid looked up and all of a sudden she just broke—and they hugged each other. And as the rest of us left, we said good luck to her.

Ron Cohen, Linda Stein, Richard Jenny, and hundreds of other volunteers serving on community reparative boards in every county of Vermont are not



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cops or lawyers or judges or jury members. Cohen is a college professor. Members of his board have included an insurance agent, an artist, a bartender, and a retired motel owner. They are not part of state or local government, yet they are wielding government's power to determine what will happen to criminal offenders. They are part of a radical experiment in criminal justice, launched in 1994, to shift government's power back into the hands of community members. "This is democracy; this is people solving their community's problems," says John Perry, one of the Vermont corrections officials who launched the effort. "I get choked up watching the boards work."

By early 1999, Vermont's reparative boards had seen more than 3,000 low-risk adult offenders who had committed the sorts of petty crimes that make up most of the workload for police, prosecutors, courts, and prisons. These low-level crimes are on citizens' minds because they wreck a community's quality of life, says Perry.

People care about shoplifting, vandalism, disorderly conduct, noise at . . . parties, and kids speeding on their streets—because those things happen thousands of times. You worry about murder if that happens in your town. But if there are loud parties every damned Friday night and nothing gets done about it, first you get angry, then you start getting afraid, and then you demand that legislators get tough on crime.

The offenders had been sentenced by a court, after pleading guilty to their crimes. Then, with the offender's approval, the sentence had been suspended, so the offender could work out a "reparative contract" with a community board. This step is a big departure from the traditional model of criminal justice in the U.S. Under the centuries-old "retributive" model, crime is viewed as a wrong against the government. Justice is adversarial—the state versus the offender. Once the state has established guilt, its method of evening the scales of justice is to punish the offender, to exact retribution by taking away something of value, such as the offender's freedom or money. In contrast, the reparative model used in Vermont sees the *community* as another victim; it achieves justice by having the offender repair the damage.

Vermont started using this model because the retributive model wasn't working well enough. In 1991, the state's prisons were extremely overcrowded. One of every four sentenced criminals was on the streets, because there was no prison space for them—the highest percentage in the country. The crime rate was down, and arrests and convictions had not increased. But the incarceration rate—the percentage of convictions leading to a prison sentence—was up substantially. More people were being sent to jail, with longer sentences, because legislators had responded to public fear of crime by passing tougher laws.



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This put impossible pressures on the corrections system. Because it didn't have enough prison space, it became known as a "revolving door." Yet citizens didn't want new prisons built in their communities, and the governor's budget office said too much money was already going to corrections. In short, the public couldn't afford the retribution its elected officials demanded.

Furthermore, sending petty criminals to prison didn't work. When offenders got out, state records showed, they were more likely to commit another crime than if they had been put on probation in the community.

Faced with these problems, corrections officials started looking for alternatives to prison for offenders who were not real risks to commit serious crimes. They used a series of focus groups and then a scientific survey to ask the public what it thought. The results were a surprise, say John Perry and John Gorczyk, the state corrections commissioner.

They did not want vengeance. They wanted what everyone wants from their children when they violate the contract each family has. They wanted a learning experience to occur.

Vermonters said they wanted nonviolent offenders to be held accountable for their crimes, but not by being sent to prison. Instead, offenders should acknowledge their crime, say they were sorry and mean it, and repair the damage they had done. And, a report on the findings said, Vermonters wanted to participate in the process:

They want IN on the decision-making because they think they can help do a better job. They think the criminal justice system isn't paying much attention to minor crime. They think we ignore the crime that most immediately impacts their lives. . . . They don't want that crime ignored, and they are willing to spend time and effort to deal with it, if we let them.

In response, the corrections department started the first community reparative boards. In every case they handle, board members and the offender must agree, in a written contract, how the offender will repair the damage he or she did to the victim and the community. Making a contract usually involves several steps: first, victims get to tell their story and say what they need to be restored; next, offenders are encouraged to take responsibility for what they did and to understand that their conduct hurt the community's well-being; finally, offenders participate in a discussion to decide how to make things right.

This is quite different from the typical sentencing process, in which the offender speaks through an attorney. "In the traditional process," note Ver-



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mont corrections officials, “the offender can continue to deny the reality of his offense . . . and continue to see himself as the victim of the system. With the reparative board, however, he has to talk about the offense, and when a whole group of his neighbors just doesn’t buy his bill of goods, he has to begin to acknowledge the reality of his offense, and at least begin to recognize his responsibility.”

Through the boards, Perry says, “the community gets to face its citizens—both the victims and the offenders—and understand the dynamic of crime on an individual level.” He describes the potential power of the process:

*The community gets an apology, an acknowledgment of a violation of the rules, and a recognition on the part of the offender that he belongs to the social contract. The offender gets to sign the social contract and gets to make amends for his crime. He gets to add value to the community and, more important, he gets to demonstrate that he **can** add value. As a result, the offender is seen as a positive force. And the community gets to embrace the victim and the offender as members of the society, rather than as pariahs.*

By 1999, every court in Vermont was using reparative boards as an alternative to sentencing. There were 41 boards. Early concerns about the program had faded. Originally, criminal justice professionals were skeptical, according to Gorczyk and Perry. “The fundamental criticism of all of these justice professionals was egocentric—how could untrained, mere citizens do the complicated job of justice?” But after four years of experience, “These criticisms have largely been muted.” In 1998, the program not only earned a budget increase, it also won a prestigious Innovations in American Government award from the Ford Foundation.

The reparative boards are clearly having positive effects. In 85 percent of their cases, according to corrections officials, the offender has reached a contract with the board and then fulfilled it. (In the rest, a contract could not be reached or the offender failed to fulfill the contract; either way, offenders were returned to court for sentencing.) When the department followed up with 154 offenders who had completed the process, it found they had an 8.2 percent recidivism rate after six months, compared to an 11.6 percent rate for those on regular probation. The program also relieves the crunch in the prison system. Based on historical patterns, Perry estimates, as many as half of the offenders sent to the boards might have ended up in prison.

In responses to surveys, about 90 percent of the offenders have expressed satisfaction about the reparative experience. Board members also report that the experience is a positive one for themselves and their communities. “For



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The Control Strategy

me, it's personally fulfilling," says Richard Jenny. "It involves working with people, the offenders, so many of whom seem to be young and uneducated, from backgrounds with psychological and social impoverishment."

In some communities, the boards have become far more involved than corrections officials expected. One board negotiated with the local prosecutor to get him to send drunk driving cases to them. It also recruited local businesses to hire offenders so they could pay their restitution. Several boards have created panels to help victims and mentoring processes for offenders after they fulfill their contracts.

Serving on a board changes the way you think about crime in your community, says Jenny. "It hammers home the fact that people who end up in our courts tend to be the people at the bottom of the social hierarchy. This is painfully evident."

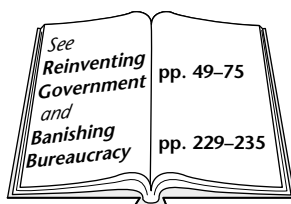
"The experience gives board members a better understanding of things in their community," adds Ron Cohen. He tells the story of a local woman who was guilty of about \$4,000 in welfare fraud. When the board asked her what had happened, Cohen recalls, she said she had three children, one of whom had a chronic illness; she needed very expensive medicine and decided to get the money even though it wasn't legal.

"Then," says Cohen, "she looked at us and said, 'What would you have done?' We looked at each other and said we would have done the same thing. That really affected people's thinking about who was in front of them and why they might have done what they did."

The bottom line for Linda Stein is that the reparative process is building her community. "It helps make offenders more a part of the community," she explains.

I would like to think that offenders who go through the program and succeed feel some caring from the community. And there's actual physical work that has been done for the community; the offenders give back to the community. This makes Newbury a better place to live.

CHANGING THE BALANCE OF POWER



Community empowerment radically undermines the exclusive control of elected officials and government managers over public decisions. It is a great American tradition that is being increasingly applied to government services: education, low-income housing, community planning, neighborhood development, economic development, business district improvements, and human services. Indeed, a 1999 poll found that 68 percent of adults in the U.S. believed the best way to solve America's problems was for "individuals within their communities [to] take responsibility for themselves"—more than triple the number who thought "government must come up with solutions."



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Community policing, through which police officers work with communities to help them solve the problems that underlie crime, has spread across the country. So has neighborhood-based planning, which engages residents in designing their own communities. When Robert Bobb was city manager of Richmond, Virginia, he wanted to give citizens more input into how public services were delivered to their neighborhoods. So he divided the city into nine planning districts, where city staff and neighborhood leaders met monthly to discuss priorities and solve problems. In 1999, Seattle began to spend \$24 million to implement plans developed by people in 37 neighborhoods. Nationally, more than 200 community-government partnerships have been created to provide neighborhood-based services for families in distress. In some American cities and in other nations—Great Britain and New Zealand, in particular—reinventors have aggressively used community empowerment to break bureaucratic control over public schools.

The spark for community empowerment usually arises from the community itself, from an earnest desire to pitch in where the public sector has failed. In Savannah, Georgia, for example, the city's main approaches to poor neighborhoods—policing and human service agencies—were having little effect. So business leaders got involved. Together with the heads of nonprofit agencies, they targeted the poorest neighborhood for an unprecedented improvement drive. The civic leaders joined with government officials to obtain a \$10 million foundation grant and then created an umbrella organization, the Youth Futures Authority (YFA).

The YFA asked neighborhood residents to help design a family resource center, then found an abandoned Catholic high school to house it. “Day and night, the center pulses with activity,” wrote an observer in 1997.

In a drug-abuse prevention program, middle school kids are studying the Nguzo Saba, African life principles to help them resist the lure of the streets, while next door the old school gym is being renovated to give them a positive alternative to the streets. . . . At the Kid's Cafe, volunteers are getting ready to serve more than 100 youngsters their daily hot meal.

In Indianapolis, help for government came from the presidents of seven inner-city neighborhood groups. They met with Mayor Steve Goldsmith in a church basement and told him they wanted to join the fight against crime. “Juanita Smith, who represented one of the very toughest neighborhoods, presented me with a contract to sign,” the mayor recalls.

Remarkably, the contract offered by Juanita not only demanded more patrols and tougher judges but also accepted more responsibilities as



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well. The contract spelled out specific actions that she and her neighbors would undertake—photographing drug dealers, recording customers' license plates, and picketing problematic landlords—to support the police. These leaders wanted to work with officers to develop specific plans for reducing crime. They asked the city to live up to its responsibility, and they were willing to play an important role in that endeavor.

Like employee and organizational empowerment, the two other approaches of the Control Strategy, community empowerment breaks the grip of government hierarchies and administrative control agencies. But it is far more radical, because it shifts control to those *outside* government. Instead of redistributing power within government's ranks, it hands power to community-based entities.

Community empowerment should not be mistaken for community *development* or community *building*, which are ways to improve the well-being of communities and usually involve much more than reinventing government. Nor should community empowerment be confused with merely boosting public participation in government decision making; it goes far beyond the notion of increasing a community's access to government decision makers. It actually gives control of government resources, programs, processes, or institutions to a community.

Alti Rodal and Nick Mulder, veteran Canadian public administrators, note that there is a continuum of government control. At one end of the continuum, they say, "The government organization is influenced by outside input but retains control." This is not community empowerment. At the other end of the spectrum, "authority and responsibility" belong to nongovernment entities. Community empowerment sometimes takes this form—when public agencies sell or give an asset, such as a public housing development or an unused school building, to a community group, for instance. Most of the time, though, community empowerment occurs in the middle of the continuum, where government *shares* authority, responsibility, investment, and risks with community-based entities.

Reinventors use community empowerment to shift government's steering or rowing functions—or both—into community hands. In the case of Vermont's reparative boards, it is rowing: the government sets the broad policies for reparative justice, and the boards implement them by making sentencing contracts with offenders. In other cases, empowered community entities take on steering functions, setting the direction, policies, and budgets for such typical government functions as welfare services and education.



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**BUREAUCRACY
VERSUS
COMMUNITY**

When Vermont asked its citizens how well they thought the state corrections department was doing, only 37 percent rated its performance as fair or good. In the eyes of department leaders, this was a sobering indictment. It forced them to rethink their purpose, according to Gorczyk and Perry:

What wasn't on the traditional corrections list of purposes . . . was what the public wanted. Not prison and probation, but justice. Not singular answers to complex problems, but solutions. Not punishment, but repair of damage. Not retribution, but restoration with value added. Not isolation and banishment, but involvement.

We realized that our product line was inadequate. Focusing on the offender for the past 200 years, we had forgotten that our customers weren't interested in our methods, and they [wanted] different outcomes than those produced by the adversarial justice system. . . .

The public was interested in . . . quality of life, cooperation, value added, and empowerment.

The alienation between Vermont's citizens and its corrections department was hardly unique. As John Gardner, chairman of the National Civic League, puts it: "Too many Americans feel hopelessly separated from the centers of decision, hopelessly jerked around by circumstances they cannot even understand, much less combat."

In many communities, people have begun to *demand* some control. One of the most dramatic examples occurred in the late 1980s in Chicago, where a coalition of parents, community activists, and business leaders went to war with the school board and the teachers' union. The school district was one of the worst in the nation. Nearly half of the students who entered the city's 18 most economically disadvantaged high schools eventually dropped out, and half of those who did graduate were reading below the ninth-grade level. Yet no one was doing anything about it. Parents and community activists were fed up, so when another teacher strike began—the ninth in 18 years—they took their anger into the streets and the state legislature. During several years of fierce politicking, community groups and business leaders negotiated a law that moved a significant amount of the school board's power, including the authority to hire and fire school principals, to governing councils elected by neighborhood residents at each of the system's nearly 600 schools.

How did it come to this, to communities versus their government bureaucracies? The fact is that for most of this century we have designed into government a strict limit on the role of communities in governance. John Clayton Thomas, a professor of public administration, traces this history in his book



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Public Participation in Public Decisions. Around the turn of the century, Thomas explains, civic reformers tried to minimize political interference in the management of government. They limited public participation to voting in elections or lobbying elected officials. The people's elected representatives were to enact laws that assigned tasks to professional administrators who would report back to them. Reformers thought administration should be insulated from political involvement. They were right about this, but many of them also pushed community members out of government as well—by building public bureaucracies and monopolies that took control of decision making and service delivery.

Several other trends contributed to this separation of government and community. The rise of a large, industrialized, urban society meant that communities, which are typically organized informally and on a small scale, could not cope with emerging problems. At the same time, a “professional ethos” took over social work, policing, education, and other occupations. This was particularly true in education, write professor Tony Bryk and his colleagues:

The ties of local school professionals to their communities eventually weakened. Instead, school-based professionals increasingly looked to their central office superiors for guidance. In this process, parents' interests and concerns were subordinated to the expertise of educational professionals. Principles of public participation and local flexibility had been exchanged for established routine, centralized authority, and professional control.

New technologies also increased the separation. Police officers walked neighborhood beats until cars and radios gave them an alternative. With the new technologies, they could respond more rapidly to reports of crimes. But because they mainly responded to crimes, they developed a limited perspective about the communities in which they worked. Officers, says Mayor Goldsmith, “left their cars only to make arrests, thus making most of their experiences in high-crime areas difficult and adversarial.” As a result, “Many officers began to assume the worst of all residents in troubled neighborhoods, and often behaved accordingly.”

The Progressive Era model of public administration came under attack in the 1960s. As Thomas explains, critics characterized it “as the enemy of the disadvantaged, servants of the elite rather than of the ‘public,’ who were sometimes willing to pursue whatever nefarious strategy was necessary to repel the demands of the disadvantaged.” This criticism remains alive today. Many protests against government plans and actions involve people, often the poor and minorities, who feel their concerns have been ignored. They seek new

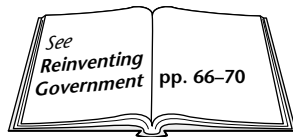


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ways of making decisions that reflect a wide range of community perspectives, not just those of professionals.

Mayors, governors, city managers, and department heads have begun to push for community empowerment from the other end, because they believe it will produce better outcomes. Vermont's corrections officials expected community boards to do a better job than the courts and prisons. The boards would reduce fear of crime: as community members dealt personally with offenders and victims, they would understand more about crime than if they read about it in the newspapers or watched it on television news. By negotiating reparative contracts with offenders, they would learn what could really be done to repair a crime's effects and to prevent its recurrence. Boards would also reduce recidivism rates, because the process would encourage both a sense of shame and of social belonging among offenders. Finally, the boards would build a stronger sense of connection within the community, which crime tends to erode. These ambitious hopes are already being realized.

Community empowerment achieves powerful effects for several reasons, as *Reinventing Government* discussed. For example:



Communities understand their problems in ways that service professionals simply cannot. “The real experts are in the neighborhoods that experience the problems,” explains Robert Woodson, president of the National Center for Neighborhood Enterprise. A community’s “indigenous knowledge” may take forms a public bureaucracy could never comprehend. In St. Louis, for instance, the Caring Communities program relies on cultural and spiritual resources as an important factor in its efforts to rebuild poor, drug-infested African American neighborhoods. “The program is grounded in Afrocentricity,” reports author Lisbeth Schorr, “emphasizing the history and contributions of African-Americans, and using Swahili principles.”

In Durham, North Carolina, Parks and Recreation Director Carl Washington heard Arthur Lee West, a former gang member and Black Panther, speak at a church about his program to keep young men out of trouble. He offered West the free use of a gymnasium and cosponsored the group—because he recognized that “no government agency has been able to match West’s success in gaining the attention and interest of the hardest-to-reach teens.”

Communities can be more creative and flexible than large service bureaucracies can. Bureaucracies are guided by rules and procedures. Community groups also have rules, but they are guided by the desire to produce results. Vermont’s reparative boards have only a handful of rules: they cannot unilaterally punish offenders, restrict their freedom, or prescribe treatment for them. Otherwise, they have room for creativity in repairing the damage done to their communities and crime victims.



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“The process is very personalized,” says Richard Jenny. “There’s no cookie-cutter. Contracts emerge out of the situation when we collectively, with the offender and victim, work on it.”

The flexibility leads to a great deal of variation in what the boards decide. Two offenders who commit the same crime, may—probably will—end up with very different reparative contracts. This variation is a stark contrast to efforts in traditional justice systems to be “fair” to offenders by ensuring that similar crimes receive similar punishment. “Variation is what we want,” declares John Perry.

*We do not want uniformity. Identical justice is not necessarily equal justice. The worst thing that justice can be is a cookie-cutter. We’re trying to define an incredible range of human behaviors, consequences, and situations. One petty theft is **not** the same as another. The point isn’t to be fair to the offender. The point is, what does the community want?*

Communities enforce standards of behavior more effectively than bureaucracies or service professionals do. Community members often respond better to their peers than to government employees. As the Heritage Foundation’s Stuart Butler observes, tenants are willing to accept from their peers in a resident corporation tough rules that they would reject if they came from city hall. And many public entities simply can’t enforce standards of behavior; the political process won’t let them, because one group or another always objects.

When communities have a stake in decision making, they are more willing to accept the results. It’s basic human nature: the more say you have over what happens, the more you are willing to accept it. When a community group has been part of a planning process, for example, it is much more likely to buy into the planning decisions—and therefore less likely to raise obstacles to implementing plans.

Community empowerment produces spillover benefits. When community groups start to exercise power, it’s not just the decisions they make that matter. The very process of making decisions can have a positive impact on the community, because it builds “social capital”—strengthened relationships and involvement in civic affairs. For instance, a 1998 study in New York City found that when some public housing residents became owners of their buildings, they also began to support one another’s families during times of crisis and to help one another find jobs and education.

What Is a Community?

Vermont’s Ron Cohen and Richard Jenny live in towns with 10,000 residents; Linda Stein’s rustic Newbury is much smaller. So it is fairly easy to say what



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their “community” is; it’s the town, a self-contained geographic and political entity. This is the usual way of identifying a community, but there are others. In large cities, for instance, different neighborhoods are distinct communities even though they don’t have formal political standing. In Chicago, reinventors organized community empowerment around the student “catchment” districts of individual public schools. In rural areas, a community may be the area within a common environmental boundary, such as a watershed.

It took a while for corrections officials in Vermont to discover which community they would empower.

“We didn’t know what ‘community’ meant when we started the reparative boards,” John Perry recalls. They assumed the boards should be organized at the county level, but it didn’t turn out that way. “The boards in practice discovered the county was too much territory to cover.” Some of the first boards started breaking up in response to *their* sense of what their community was. In Chelsea, a town of fewer than 1,000 souls, board members decided that they couldn’t hear a case from Randolph, a slightly larger town some 15 miles away, because the offender “wasn’t from here.” So a board member from Randolph started a new board there.

“We didn’t define community,” says Perry. “We let it define itself.”

Not all communities are based on location, like towns. They can be based on shared interests: a group of businesses, professionals, or nonprofit service providers, or even a government program’s customers or compliers. Several years ago, for instance, the federal agency for workplace safety, the Occupational Safety and Health Administration (OSHA), realized it would take 87 years for its inspectors to visit every worksite in the U.S. So OSHA experimented in Maine with turning the inspection over to employers and labor unions. Injury rates dropped 35 percent.

When the city of Santa Fe, New Mexico, adopted a plan for affordable housing, it turned to nine local nonprofit organizations. They created the Santa Fe Affordable Housing Roundtable, which has wide latitude to design and implement programs. In British Columbia, the provincial social services agency handed over the design and administration of a new program to assist families in caring for severely disabled children to the children’s parents, charitable organizations, and community representatives. In Florida, Governor Chiles and the state legislature dissolved the state’s Department of Commerce and gave responsibility for economic development to Florida’s business community, working in partnership with government.

However you define community, *don’t* define it as “local elected officials.” Handing power to a mayor or county officials does not put it into the hands of community groups.



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Holding Communities Accountable

Vermont's community reparative boards have a great deal of discretion in how they operate, says Perry.

The parameters we set were focused on the positive outcomes we wanted to achieve: Restore and make the victim whole. Make amends to the community. Learn about the impact of the crime. Learn ways to avoid reoffending. These are in three-inch letters on the boards' walls. They can do anything they want to get there.

So different boards work quite differently. Some conduct meetings that are quite informal; others hold no-nonsense, just-the-facts sessions. Some boards ask the offender to leave after hearing from him or her, so they can discuss in private their ideas about a reparative contract. Others talk about it in front of the offender. Some boards make decisions by consensus and rotate the chair for every meeting; others don't.

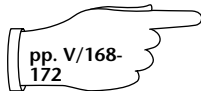
When the corrections department has tried to impose more order on the process, boards have sometimes refused to go along. "Whenever we try to get too specific, the boards rebel," says Perry. "As soon as we start treating them like state employees, they say no." At one point the department developed a lengthy training manual for board members. "It was about 500 pages thick," Perry recalls. "The boards protested; it's now about 20 pages long."

Still, the boards are accountable for their performance. The commissioner of the corrections department appoints all board members, and if they fail to respect the department's parameters, he may revoke the appointments. This has happened several times, says Perry—mainly when a board member focused on just punishing offenders instead of getting them to repair the damage they caused.

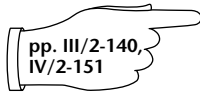
This is a form of *administrative* accountability. Essentially, board members have a contract with the department to follow the basic guidelines, and the department has full discretion to judge how well they are doing. Such accountability is usually built into a tool we call an empowerment agreement.

Community groups can also be held *politically* accountable, although this is fairly rare. In Chicago, the hundreds of Local School Councils (LSCs) that have gained significant authority over each school are accountable to voters, not school district administrators or even school district board members. Some 6,000 LSC members are elected every two years by residents in the school council's neighborhood.

Community entities can also be held accountable through any of the Consequences Strategy approaches: enterprise management, managed competi-



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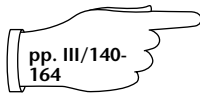


tion, or performance management. And these methods can be augmented by the Customer Strategy approaches.

The keys to holding empowered community groups accountable for their performance are much the same as those for empowered government organizations and employees:

They must have clear goals and parameters from the outset. Community groups must be clear about what they are trying to accomplish and what authority they have. The Youth Futures Authority in Savannah, for instance, focuses on reducing the school dropout rate, preventing teen pregnancies, improving students' academic performance, and increasing the number of youths who go to college.

Community groups must also know where the lines are drawn when it comes to their authority. These outcomes and boundaries should be spelled out in writing as power is shifted to the community.



They must measure their performance and make the results public. Without performance data, community groups cannot tell how well they are doing, and neither can anyone else. Such data is a fundamental element of accountability, no matter which approach you are using. Sharing information about results also helps promote even more community involvement, because it allows people to see that community-based efforts can have a real impact on their problems.

Making Government Community-Friendly

Vermont's community reparative boards depend on the state department of corrections for essential services. The agency doesn't tell the boards what to do, but it does provide them with training, administrative support, advice, and performance evaluation.

Early on, corrections officials realized that their agency wasn't ready for this radically new role. So "we essentially blew up the organization," says John Perry, the planning director. They created a unit for reparative services and staffed it with employees who volunteered. "We let the staff choose where they would go, to focus on what they wanted to do," explains Perry. "So the people we got were the experimenters, the risk takers, the entrepreneurs."

More recently, the department has been exploring ways to devolve to local communities its authority over the boards and its supportive role. "Our experience has been that the towns really want to take this over," says Perry. "What they do not want is a pig in a poke or to get left holding the bag." So the department has asked the legislature to give funding for the boards to the towns, not the department. (How often have you seen state bureaucracies do *that*?)



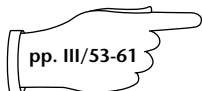
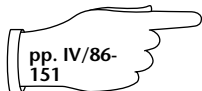
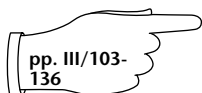
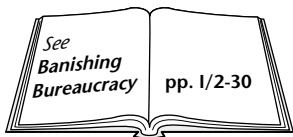
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In its evolution from launching an experimental program to potentially devolving ownership to local government, the Department of Corrections has been reacting to a fundamental reality: when you empower community groups, you must further reinvent government so that it can do its part in the new power-sharing arrangement. Handing power to communities and then having them interact with public agencies that behave bureaucratically is a recipe for disaster.

Many reinventors understand this but still struggle to find a solution. They tend to tinker with the structure of government. In Indianapolis, Mayor Goldsmith divided the city into nine “townships” and assigned an administrator—a “mini mayor”—to each one to learn what the neighborhoods needed and to deliver it. In Hampton, Virginia, then-city manager Bob O’Neill created the Department of Neighborhood Services to help neighborhood groups gain access to city government’s resources. But both efforts—one a decentralized structure, the other a centralized one—found it difficult to get the *rest* of the bureaucracy to respond to the neighborhoods; most departments continued with business as usual.

These and similar experiences elsewhere reinforce the central lesson of *Banishing Bureaucracy*: to accomplish significant change in bureaucratic behavior, you must change the purpose, accountability, incentives, controls, and culture of government organizations. When you change only the structure, you usually don’t get much leverage. Establishing a department for neighborhoods in Hampton did not significantly increase the incentives for other agencies to respond to neighborhoods’ needs, for example. Such structural changes can even have a negative impact: when an agency or administrator is designated as the “neighborhood connection,” other agencies and administrators often feel they are off the hook.

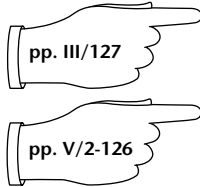
In short, to create community-friendly government, you must use the five strategies, not simply redraw government’s organizational chart. Specifically, you might:



- Give some departments specific performance goals related to the condition of the community, with consequences.
- Have some agencies treat community groups as customers, measuring their satisfaction with services and establishing service standards, guarantees, and redress policies.
- Give community groups control of public funds that they can use to purchase services from city departments. (For ideas about how to design this, see internal enterprise management.)



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The Control Strategy

- Offer performance bonuses to managers and employees who partner well with communities.
- Use the Culture Strategy tools to help public employees understand the importance of community groups.

A particularly pervasive barrier to community empowerment is the way government is organized into functional silos that separate public employees and funds into narrow, specialized categories. This is compounded by the federal and state levels, which routinely use categorical funding streams to channel money to the local level. The silos make it nearly impossible to mount comprehensive efforts to deal with a community's problems. Instead, each agency and its administrators focus on their niche. No one is responsible for thinking about the whole picture—or even for collaborating with other agencies.

To overcome this separation, reinventors in Louisville, Kentucky, and San Diego County, California, began training professionals who dealt with community problems together. They “have found it very productive to train social workers, police officers, nurses, teachers, mental health workers, probation officers, community liaison workers, and others together, rather than separately,” according to the Center for the Study of Social Policy. “The aim is to develop a common perspective on helping families and a common set of core skills within a neighborhood delivery system.”

Many communities discover the limits of categorization when they tackle crime problems. It became obvious to Indianapolis mayor Goldsmith that even when police and community residents worked together, they needed the help of other agencies to clean up drug-infested neighborhoods. City attorneys helped the city seize dozens of abandoned properties, while the public health and fire departments wrote citations for nuisances that violated city ordinances and the city demolished dilapidated buildings and gave sound structures to community organizations. “In the first two years of the project,” Goldsmith says, “more than a hundred nuisance sites were corrected or conveyed to not-for-profit development corporations.” Accomplishing this required a great deal of coordination among the agencies—the typical method of dealing with categorization. Coordination is necessary, but it is often an unnatural act between unconsenting partners. Unless it is combined with reinvention strategies, it will rarely be enough to make governments more responsive to empowered communities.

Building a Community's Capacity

In Vermont, members of community reparative boards are not simply thrown into the fray. The first members were trained for their new task by participating



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in mock board meetings. “One of us [from the corrections department] would play the offenders,” says John Perry, “and the board would try to figure out what to do. Some of our probation officers know all of the tricks, how to hustle you.” Since those early days, the orientation process has evolved. Now new board members can observe board meetings, read materials about reparative justice, and talk with the state’s coordinator for their board. In addition, they must participate in 15 hours of training within their first six months. “Board members participate in role-playing exercises and other activities designed to develop good communications skills in their interactions with offenders, victims, and other board members,” says David Karp, a sociologist who studies the boards. Ongoing board members must participate in seven hours of training each year.

As Vermont found, it’s important to prepare community members for empowerment. A number of cities—including Hampton, Dayton, and Indianapolis—have set up institutes or colleges to educate and train neighborhood residents (and city employees) for empowerment. Indianapolis created the Neighborhood Empowerment Initiative, funded by three national foundations, to provide neighborhood associations with training, technical assistance, and workshops to learn how to work with one another and local government. The city also set up the Neighborhood Resource Center, located in a building donated by a local hospital. Run by a board of community activists, it holds workshops and classes for citizens and neighborhood associations and acts as an information clearinghouse on programs and initiatives in the neighborhoods. In its first three years, the center helped create 80 new neighborhood and homeowner associations.

“Building capacity in these ways is a great idea,” says Ted Staton, city manager of East Lansing, Michigan. “But you should make sure that there’s a place for people after they finish training—an advisory board, a commission, whatever, where they can use what they’ve learned.”

Often, communities need extensive technical assistance to help strengthen community organizations so that they can take and use power. In Canada, for instance, tenant groups get technical assistance before a housing co-op is created and for five years after occupancy. In the U.S., public housing residents often get technical assistance before their resident management corporations take over management of their developments.

Information is another element of capacity building. Charlotte, North Carolina, created detailed profiles of its 73 inner-city neighborhoods. Information of this sort can become the basis for performance indicators to measure the impact city agencies and community organizations are having on neighborhoods.

Information about the various tools community groups can use is also valuable. Seattle maintains and publicizes an index of more than 50 tools for com-



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munity groups, including a primer for designing effective community participation, a planning guide for parks and open space, a guide to zoning, a video about designing city streets, and a handbook on neighborhood planning.

When reinventors build community capacity, they must walk a fine line between providing too little support and providing too much. If you do too much, you're likely to hobble the community by creating dependence on your support. But if you keep your hands off, the community may flounder.

Former president Jimmy Carter erred on the side of providing too little direction when he launched the Atlanta Project, designed to rebuild the city's decaying neighborhoods in time for the 1996 Olympics. Carter emphasized a bottom-up approach: "I have seen so many programs designed by brilliant people," he said, "and they have all failed because we didn't allow the people to whom the programs were directed to decide." But after five years, there was not much to show for the effort, reports Lisbeth Schorr. "The Atlanta Project may have overlearned one valuable lesson to the exclusion of several other, equally important ones," she writes in *Common Purpose*. "Leery of dictating to those they intended to help, the project leaders leaned far over backward in providing only a blank slate and a process—and no substantive guidance."

However you develop a community's capacity, it is important to ensure that it does not get tied up in bureaucratic red tape from government's central administrative agencies. You still need safeguards such as audits and investigations. But if you handcuff community groups with ironclad rules and regulations, you will diminish the advantages of empowering them in the first place.

**COMMUNITY
EMPOWERMENT:
OTHER LESSONS
LEARNED**

Empowering communities involves two steps: shifting power from government to the community, then organizing at the community level to use the power effectively. As we've seen, accomplishing this reinvention two-step requires both partners to learn new dancing skills. Governments must reinvent themselves to play new roles as coaches, listeners, and responsive partners. Community entities must learn how to produce results. Like public organizations, they should get clear about their purposes, face consequences for performance, be accountable to their customers, empower their employees, and create entrepreneurial cultures focused on continuous improvement.

As governments and community entities undertake these challenging tasks—often working in tandem—they can benefit from the lessons learned by those already on the path to community empowerment.

1. Public officials who want to empower communities must build trust first.

Usually, public officials have to take the first steps to overcome the pervasive distrust between government and communities. This is because *they* hold



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the power that must be shared. To begin with, they have to decide to trust the community. “Government has a lot to learn,” says Vermont’s John Perry. “We think the communities don’t trust us, when in fact we don’t trust them.”

Officials also have to stop assuming that all the public wants from government is results. Citizens do want results, but often they want to be involved in producing the results. That’s what Vermont officials found. When city commissioners in Battle Creek, Michigan, conducted a poll and newsletter survey and held 10 focus groups, they discovered the same thing: residents wanted local government to actively solve community problems, but they wanted it to be more a convener than a doer. Residents wanted teamwork between citizens and community organizations.

Public officials also need to say clearly that they want a new relationship with the community. But the key to building trust is not words; it is deeds. And the deeds must respond to real community desires. In Indianapolis, Mayor Goldsmith learned this the hard way. He was visiting the Fountain Square neighborhood on the city’s southeast side to announce new infrastructure investments. “I was greeted by children picketing the press conference and carrying signs demanding a new neighborhood park,” he recalls. “The children complained that they had no place to play; their mothers told me of syringes lying in plain sight on the streets and open drainage holes as big as craters.”

The mayor asked one of the demonstration leaders, Estelle Parsons, what she wanted.

More police and a new playground, she said without missing a beat. She proceeded to tell me precisely where the playground could go. I told Estelle the city would have a park and a playground on the spot she identified within ninety days. When Estelle and I cut the ribbon on that park ninety days later, everyone was amazed—including me. Gradually, we began to build trust between City Hall and the neighborhoods.

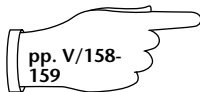
It’s not enough to build a community’s trust in government *leaders*, however. At some point, citizens must believe that ordinary public employees will respond to their needs, too. In Minneapolis in 1990, for instance, three government agencies launched the Community Action and Resource Exchange (CARE) program to involve citizens in dealing with drug problems in their neighborhoods. The residents of the first neighborhood they targeted were skeptical initially, said Jay Clark, director of the Jordan Area Community Council: “They thought the city people were a bunch of lazy farts.” But when the city started listening to their complaints and responding—closing down crack houses and curbing gang activity—the residents’ attitudes changed. “When citizens found they could come with a complaint and it would be handled soon,



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they'd be impressed," said Jim Haugen, a police officer involved with CARE. "They got the impression that they could actually talk to the city and we would listen." Clark described how the residents saw it: "The city people have changed."

Getting public employees to give power to communities can be difficult. Police unions sometimes block changes in deployment necessary to implement community policing, for example. And many professionals resist community empowerment because they are skeptical that community organizations or volunteers can do the job. Reinventors must overcome this resistance, using other reinvention strategies to pull and push public employees through the changes that community empowerment requires.

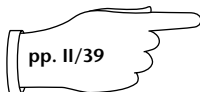


2. Information is a powerful stimulus for community empowerment.

In the late 1980s, Don Mendonsa, the city manager of Savannah, asked the school superintendent for data on school dropouts by race, gender, and grade. Mendonsa was worried about juvenile crime; large numbers of idle teenagers were hanging out downtown, not in school and not working. At first, the superintendent refused to provide the data, saying it was privileged information that had never been released before. When the city manager insisted, the data showed that of 16,270 students in grades six to twelve, 21 percent had failed, over one-third were at least a grade behind, nearly a third had missed 16 or more days of school, and 13 percent dropped out every year.

When the data became public, it caused an uproar. The school superintendent resigned, and community members and city officials put together an initiative to turn things around. The key energizer was information, says Mendonsa: "If we had not aired our dirty linen in public, showing these astounding failure rates, I'm not sure we would have had as much support from the public as we've gotten."

The information in Savannah was powerful because it contained disturbing news. In other communities, a "community scorecard," which presents data on a range of indicators, is used to prod the citizenry and government into action. Such a system "can present great motivation for community self-improvement," says Con Hogan, head of Vermont's human services agency. In 1993, he addressed the Rotary Club in Bennington. "Usually they are twenty minute, two point speeches and they are over and done with," he says.



However, this particular day I took down two charts. The first chart was the good news chart. I showed them the early stages of what looked to be the beginning of a very strong trend curve in the reduction of child abuse in Vermont. A couple of people in the audience at that point spontaneously applauded, and I was a little taken aback.



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I guess I hadn't thought through how fundamental this issue is to many people.

And then, I showed them the bad news chart. The chart showed that even though the news around the state of Vermont is good, the same can't be said for Bennington. In fact, in an environment where overall child abuse rates were going down, theirs was going up. A minute later, I had normally calm businesspeople very upset. They demanded to know why it was happening in their community, where it was better, why it was improving in other areas, and what they could do about it. I am pleased to report that since then, child abuse rates in Bennington have declined significantly, almost to the level of the state's improving rate.

3. Community empowerment requires patience and early successes.

It can take years for community entities to work well as decision makers and doers, especially when they must work closely with government agencies. Vermont's reparative program, first piloted in 1994, took four years before it started handling a substantial level of cases. As a result, reinventors often find they have to "go slow to go fast." They must take the time to build trust, relationships, knowledge, and skills, so they can create the capacity to move more quickly later. Indeed, not taking the time up front may only waste time later.

Thus, some reinventors prefer to phase in community empowerment. Missouri launched its Caring Communities effort—a partnership of parents, community leaders, school staff, and state agencies—in 1989 in one school. Five months later, it launched a second project, in a rural area. By 1995, it was spending \$24 million to expand Caring Communities to 50 sites. While expanding the program, the state simplified procedures, changed budgeting and financing practices, and gave more and more power to local leaders.

Other public leaders have to give the empowered community organization time to "shake out"—to test itself, adapt, and improve. Savannah's Youth Futures Authority had a rocky start before it became a successful model. Early on it had to adjust its mission. Then it failed to develop a partnership with the city's school system.

Starting small and slowly runs the risk of leaving the public and the politicians unsatisfied, of course. They may lose patience or interest before community empowerment has demonstrated its effectiveness.

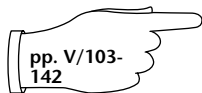
There are at least two solutions to this dilemma: first, manage the expectations of the community, so people understand that the payoff is long-term; and second, deliver some short-term victories. Reinventors should make sure that they get some easy wins, such as shutting down a crack house or solving a truancy problem, even as they begin building the community's capacity.



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4. **Empower your public employees to help prepare them to work with empowered community groups.**

Working in an environment where you share decision-making power is quite different from working in one where you hold all the cards. And working with community groups is often messier and less predictable than working within government bureaucracies is. Employees must learn to listen to the community without becoming defensive when its members vent their frustrations. They must learn to listen to many voices, some of which conflict. They must learn to respond in ways that enlist the community's energies, rather than relying solely on the government. They must learn to be patient with the often tedious process of building buy-in throughout a community. Most essential, they must fully embrace the philosophy that underpins community empowerment—the belief that communities can and should solve some of their own problems.



In addition to training and education, a powerful way to help public employees adapt to community empowerment is to empower *them*. To help employees learn how to collaborate with communities, get them into the habit of collaborating inside their organizations.

5. **Don't just empower "the usual suspects."**

Everyone has some idea of who "the community" is, and usually these ideas don't include people or groups who have not been visibly active. So it's likely that government officials and even civic leaders will overlook the possibility of shifting power to nontraditional players in the community: small business owners, youth, or the poor, for instance. This is a mistake. As one study puts it, empowerment "is not about a small number of community leaders sitting around a table and making decisions for the larger community."

Compounding the problem is the fact that most communities already have organizations that have grown up in response to local needs. Some represent the grass roots, but others don't. Usually, though, reaching beyond the usual suspects is less a question of whom to avoid and more a matter of figuring out how to engage people and organizations that are not typically on the list. There are many ways of doing this:

- Reach out to grassroots community entities: churches, small businesses, service and fraternal organizations, and neighborhood associations, among others.
- Target specific outreach strategies for different constituencies—senior citizens, young people, renters, gays.
- Provide sufficient funding to ensure that parties with fewer resources or less time are able to participate.



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The Control Strategy

- Use bilingual materials and public service advertisements to publicize opportunities for involvement, and use interpreters at meetings if necessary.
- Design meetings and other processes to overcome barriers to participation. For example, holding meetings in central locations near mass transit lines helps people who don't have cars. Providing free or low-cost child care helps people with young children.
- Train and employ community members to conduct outreach efforts to their neighbors. Lisbeth Schorr reports that neighborhood residents in Baltimore were trained and paid to participate in the design of new community-based programs:

Some could reach out to young mothers. Others knew the streets and could relate to the long-term unemployed and the drug culture. One advocate was a high school dropout who proved particularly valuable in encouraging young people to stay in school. All had been unemployed at the time they were hired. Some were struggling with drug problems or hampered by criminal records. Most lacked the self-confidence to take the necessary steps for their own advancement. Yet each was able to connect to a particular place, culture, or subgroup within the neighborhood.

6. Build accountability into community organizations to protect them from criticism.

Reinventors should anticipate that community empowerment will draw fire from skeptics or opponents. Particularly if the partnership is a new organization, people in existing entities may fear losing some of their authority and status. Public employees or their unions may attack community organizations for mishandling resources or not being accountable. That's why analysts at the Center for the Study of Social Policy emphasize that empowered community entities "must 'bend over backwards' to demonstrate [their] accountability for operations, expenditures, services, and results." They warn against delay in creating accountability:

The usual excuse given for ignoring accountability issues is that this issue can be addressed only after governance entities have built their basic capacities for planning and implementing programs. According to this logic, accountability is important after many other responsibilities of local governance are under way.

In fact, the opposite seems to be true: unless a climate of accountability is established immediately with regard to local governance en-



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tities, they run the risk of repeating the mistakes (and having the lack of impact) of the existing system. Furthermore, establishing up-front accountability for local governance entities may be essential to garner necessary public, political and financial support.

7. Beware of creating a bureaucratic wolf in community clothing.

Government's tendency to bureaucratize everything dies slowly. John Perry finds that some of his colleagues keep insisting that the community reparative boards operate in a more orderly fashion. "From the bureaucrats, I hear, 'We have to do some procedures.' The boards say, 'Get off our backs; we know what we're doing.'" This tug-of-war is natural during an empowerment process, but it's usually a mistake to give in to the bureaucratic impulse. Public officials must consciously resist the tempting sense of control and order that bureaucracy offers. They must recognize that variation is an advantage of community control, because one size does not fit all. The point of empowerment is to create entrepreneurial, community-based entities that will produce better results than government bureaucracies do.

RESOURCES ON COMMUNITY EMPOWERMENT

Clint Bolick. *Transformation: The Promise and Politics of Empowerment*. Oakland, Calif.: Institute for Contemporary Studies Press, 1998. In a fast-paced argument for community empowerment across a wide spectrum of government services, Bolick provides telling anecdotes and an array of policy ideas.

National Center for Neighborhood Enterprise. The nerve center of a national movement to empower tenants of public housing to manage and own their own developments, NCNE provides information and technical assistance on empowerment of poor communities. Contact them at 1367 Connecticut Ave., N.W., Washington DC 20036. Phone: (202) 331-1103.

John G. Perry and John F. Gorczyk. "Restructuring Corrections: Using Market Research in Vermont." *Corrections Management Quarterly*, 1997, 1(3), 26-35. Provides background on Vermont's community reparative boards and the paradigm-shifting philosophy of reparative justice.

William R. Potapchuk, Jarle Crocker, and William H. Schechter Jr. *Systems Reform and Local Government: Improving Outcomes for Children, Families, and Neighborhoods*. Washington, D.C.: Program for Community Problem Solving, February 1997. This relatively brief paper provides an overview of reinvention in local governments, with a focus on the community empowerment approach.



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Program for Community Problem Solving. Established in 1988 and cosponsored by the National League of Cities, the American Chamber of Commerce Executives, the International City/County Management Association, the International Downtown Association, and the National Civic League, this organization offers training, presentations, technical assistance, coaching, facilitation, information, and publications about collaborative approaches for communities. Based in Washington, D.C. Phone: (202) 783-2961.

Lisbeth B. Schorr. *Common Purpose*. New York: Anchor Books, 1997. Focusing mainly on how to strengthen families and neighborhoods, Schorr provides a rich compendium of community-based change efforts. Chapter Three, “Taming Bureaucracies to Support What Works,” lays out a strong case for community empowerment.

TOOLS FOR COMMUNITY EMPOWERMENT

Empowerment Agreements create a power-sharing understanding between a government agency and an empowered community group, specifying the responsibilities of both parties. See below.

Community Governance Bodies are community-based steering organizations with the authority to make decisions and take on responsibilities once handled by government organizations. See p. V/172.

Collaborative Planning gives community entities decision-making authority in the planning of community and public projects and regulations. See p. V/174.

Community-Based Funding provides revenues to empowered community groups, either directly from government revenues or through the power to generate their own funds. See p. V/181.

EMPOWERMENT AGREEMENTS

In Boston in 1989, a pregnant white woman, Carol Stuart, was murdered. Her husband told police that a young black male had committed the crime. What happened next outraged the city’s African American community. “The Boston police descended on inner-city neighborhoods in their search,” report Harvard sociologists Orlando Patterson and Christopher Winthrop. “The police tactics



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in the Stuart investigation, along with the stop-and-frisk policies of the City-wide Anti-Crime Unit,” led to protests about rights violations.

It turned out that the husband had committed the murder. But out of the tensions created during the initial search for a suspect emerged a partnership between the police and community leaders, particularly a group of black ministers known as the Ten-Point Coalition. “This partnership is key to explaining why Boston has been successful in reducing crime,” say Patterson and Winthrop, noting that the city’s homicide rate fell 77 percent between 1990 and 1999. The key to the partnership, they continue, has been a set of principles that bind the government and community together in mutual responsibility.

One principle spells out the responsibility of the community partners to help police identify the small percentage of youths who are causing most of the crime. Another makes it clear that if police behave badly, they will be punished. A third states that community leaders will have an informal say in decisions to arrest certain teenagers, such as those with no prior offenses.

Shared principles such as those laid out in Boston are one element of empowerment agreements between organizations and community entities. They define the basic commitments each party is willing to make to behave in new ways. Other elements include the following:

- **The measurable results the community and government partners hope to produce.** In Portland, Oregon, for instance, the police, citizens, neighborhood groups, and businesses negotiate and sign a written agreement that lists the goals of their community policing effort in particular parts of the city, as well as specific actions the partners and police will take.

- **The specific authority that government is shifting to the community.** In Georgia, state government shifted the authority to allocate some social service funds to Savannah’s Youth Futures Authority.

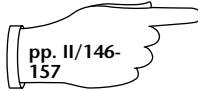
- **The ways that government agencies and community groups will collaborate.** In Dane County, Wisconsin, the agreement defines how teams of community members, police officers, public health nurses, social workers, and school staff will team up in neighborhoods to improve the health of children.

- **The consequences that either partner faces for the quality of their performance.** When a public housing authority gives tenants who have organized a resident management corporation the right to operate their own housing development, for instance, the contract often spells out performance goals, incentives, and penalties. If the corporation fails to keep performance up to the standards, it loses the right to run the development. This should go both ways, however. If the public housing authority fails to meet its standards—for police protection, its contribution to maintenance, or financial support—it should face penalties, too.

These empowerment agreements should be in writing, and they should



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be public. They may take many forms: contracts, protocols for collaboration, memoranda of understanding, or co-investment agreements. They are similar to the flexible performance agreements (FPAs) described in Chapter Three, and many of the lessons learned about FPAs will help you design more effective community empowerment agreements.

By negotiating empowerment agreements, community and government leaders get an opportunity to assess each other's intentions and commitments. This helps build understanding and trust. By spelling out who does what—and the reciprocal commitments among the parties—such agreements set the stage for the community to use its new power. And by specifying consequences for performance, they give each partner recourse if something goes wrong.

Empowerment Agreements: Other Lessons Learned

1. Maintain the community's independence from government.

Even when they are accountable to public officials, empowered communities must have an autonomous voice and be free to take independent positions. They should not become just an arm of the government, for this would compromise their ability to work effectively in the community.

2. Focus on realistic goals.

After establishing principles, the most important aspects of an empowerment agreement are the shared goals that the community and government adopt. These should come before any decisions about strategies or actions. It's important to be candid about what can and cannot be accomplished by the community organization. Setting goals too high will put too much pressure on the community and lead to disappointment when the goals are not achieved. Think about making incremental progress—not gigantic (and unrealistic) leaps. For instance, the goal of completely eradicating open-air drug sales in a neighborhood is probably unrealistic, whereas the goal of cutting the rate in half may not be.

The national goals for academic achievement by the year 2000 that U.S. governors set in the late 1980s were completely unrealistic, as many school districts are finding. The Illinois legislature compounded the problem by setting them as five-year goals for every school in Chicago. This may have played well as political rhetoric, but “as a timetable for institutional change in a major urban school district with more than 400,000 students and 25,000 teachers, it is simply not realistic,” note the authors of a comprehensive study of Chicago school reform.

3. Build in administrative flexibility.

Lisbeth Schorr, in her book *Common Purpose*, tells a story of a typical elected official's reaction to the idea of variation in community initiatives:



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My presentation was to follow a film on the family support centers recently established in Kentucky. The film emphasized the significant variation in design and operations in each of the seven centers shown. Before I could begin to speak, the lieutenant governor [of Illinois] interrupted to ask whether I supported the local variation that the film seemed to be promoting. When I indicated—to his horror—that I did, he said, “Now look here, we have one hundred and two counties in Illinois; surely you’re not saying that the State of Illinois should fund one hundred and two family support centers, each of which would look different from the others? That would be an administrative nightmare!”

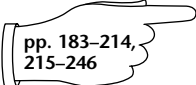
Of course, it would only be a nightmare to those who focus on control and order rather than results. As Schorr points out, family support centers are “more likely to accomplish their purpose if they [are] shaped by local communities to reflect local needs and strengths.”

Empowerment agreements must recognize that flexibility is an essential part of sharing power with communities. Imposing government’s bureaucratic administrative systems—for budgeting, procurement, and personnel—on community groups will only diminish their chances of producing the desired results. That doesn’t mean anything goes, but it does mean that public officials should encourage entrepreneurial approaches that help community entities produce results, rather than controlling how they produce them.

Vermont’s Success by Six initiative took this approach. State government challenged local communities to develop comprehensive strategies to reduce infant mortality and promote healthy development of children in the first three years of life. “Communities were encouraged to develop their own approach to achieving these results, rather than following any one service model,” reports the Center for the Study of Social Policy. “Vermont communities and state agency officials believe that the resulting local plans were more creative, more rooted in local conditions, and more cost-effective than if the state had tried to mandate one or two strategies that every community must use.” North Carolina’s huge Smart Start initiative, created by Governor Jim Hunt to help ensure that every child was ready for school, used the same approach.

4. Use performance incentives.

Creating consequences for performance stimulates government agencies to improve their performance—and it can do the same for community entities. Governments can use managed competition with community-based organizations, and they can use many of the performance management tools outlined in Chapter 11. Maryland’s state government, for instance, offers financial incentives to its Local Management Boards (LMBs)—collaborative



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215–246



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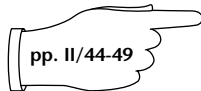
community-government groups that provide services to children and families—if they produce predetermined outcomes and spend less money than state agencies would have. LMBs can use their earned incentives to pay for comprehensive services. In Baltimore, the LMB used incentives it earned to finance parent support groups, beds in the Salvation Army shelter, and school projects.

RESOURCE ON EMPOWERMENT AGREEMENTS

Center for the Study of Social Policy. *Creating a Community Agenda: How Governance Partnerships Can Improve Results for Children, Youth, and Families*. Washington, D.C.: Center for the Study of Social Policy, February 23, 1998. An excellent first step toward a curriculum on this and other aspects of community empowerment, this document is based on research from a number of community-government partnerships and is aimed squarely at practitioners.

COMMUNITY GOVERNANCE BODIES

***Community Governance Bodies* are community-based steering organizations with the authority to make decisions and take on responsibilities once handled by government organizations.**



When community entities make decisions about what social services a neighborhood should receive, what outcomes government agencies should focus on achieving, or which plan to use to improve environmental conditions, they are steering. They are community-based versions of the steering organizations we described in Chapter Five. They set goals, choose strategies, and measure performance against goals. They may also conduct research and analysis, convene community leaders, develop a vision for the community, coordinate the work of diverse organizations, and use contracts, charters, vouchers, performance agreements, and other means to direct the work of rowing organizations. To distinguish them from government-driven steering organizations, we call them community governance bodies.

There is no standard model for what a community governance body looks like or how it should operate. However, a great many of Chapter Five's lessons learned and do's and don'ts apply, particularly the following:

- Strong governance bodies should have control over significant resources.
- Steering organizations should steer resources, not manage them.
- Don't tie governance bodies' hands with categorical funding.
- Don't promise too much too soon.



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Using Community Governance Bodies: Other Lessons Learned

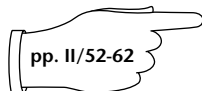
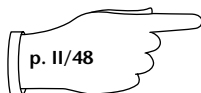
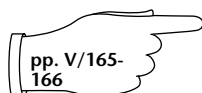
Some additional lessons apply specifically to community governance bodies:

1. *Get many different hands on the steering wheel.*

A key issue for community governance bodies is the makeup of their boards. When the Center for the Study of Social Policy studied such organizations in the human services field, it found that they tended to have governing boards of 15 to 30 people, with a mix of community advocates, local residents, businesspeople, and elected officials from the city, county, and school districts. In other words, they were a mosaic of a community's many stakeholders.

As we said earlier in the chapter, there are many techniques for ensuring that community empowerment includes more than “the usual suspects” in a community. In addition, governance bodies should reexamine their membership periodically to see if it is still broadly representative of the community.

Some governance bodies include government officials as members of their boards. Others, such as Kansas City's Local Investment Commission (LINC), which oversees the local office of the state Department of Social Services, are citizen-only boards. (LINC allows elected officials to participate as ex-officio members of the board and has an advisory cabinet of officials from public agencies.) In our view, local context should determine whether or not elected officials are part of the governance body. However, as we said in Chapter Five, it is important to keep providers—from the private or public sectors—off steering boards, since they have potential conflicts of interest in setting direction.



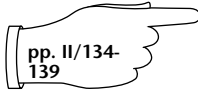
2. *Ensure that steering decisions affect the use of resources.*

Steering—setting direction—is meaningful only if it affects the way resources are used. So there must be a clear link between steering and spending. One way to ensure this is to give the governance body the power to set budgets for public funds—or at least veto power over the budgets in question. A less radical method is to build consideration of the governance body's recommendations into the government's process for setting budget priorities. Whatever the method of control, reinventors should use performance budgeting for funds that are influenced or controlled by communities, so that there will be a direct tie between budget levels and results.

Community governance bodies should also seek to affect other spending in the community: by foundations, corporations, and nonprofit organizations. After all, community governance is not just about public institutions; it is about leading all community institutions and members to solve problems and meet community needs.



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The Control Strategy**3. Uncouple steering and rowing.**

As we explain in Chapter Three, separating the steering and rowing functions in government has important positive effects. The most significant one for a steering body is that instead of having to do the rowing itself, it gains the flexibility to select from a wide range of service delivery options. In addition, its decisions won't be influenced by its interests as a provider, and it will be easier to hold providers accountable for their performance.

4. Monitor the performance of rowing organizations—and hold them accountable.

Without data about performance, steering bodies can't steer very well. They cannot tell what is working and what is not, and they cannot hold anyone accountable for their performance. So governing bodies must build a mandate to track performance into their relationship with rowing organizations. In Maryland, Local Management Boards that develop community-based services for children and families look at performance data every month. "The impact of having these data on a continuous basis has been remarkable," reports one observer. "Board members can spot when program implementation is not being effective and immediately change course or refine their programmatic initiatives and policy strategies."

RESOURCE ON COMMUNITY GOVERNANCE BODIES

Center for the Study of Social Policy. *Creating a Community Agenda: How Governance Partnerships Can Improve Results for Children, Youth, and Families*. Washington, D.C.: Center for the Study of Social Policy, February 23, 1998. An excellent first step toward a curriculum on this and other aspects of community empowerment.

COLLABORATIVE PLANNING***Collaborative Planning* gives community entities decision-making authority in the planning of community and public projects and regulations.**

In 1992, the Chicago Transit Authority considered shutting down the Lake Street "El," one line of its famous elevated rail system. A region-wide coalition of 200 community groups—churches, businesses, transit riders, neighborhood councils, and the like—rose up in noisy opposition. Meeting in church basements, the activists held six planning workshops for community members. Since the transit authority contended that ridership on the line was too low to merit further public investment, they focused on showing how a rejuvenated line could be a shot in the arm for the neighborhoods it traversed.



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To model this transit-driven community development strategy, they used the workshops to redesign the Pulaski Street station.

“The meetings allowed people in the communities to say what a revitalized train station and community would look like for them,” says Scott Bernstein, president of the Center for Neighborhood Technology, one of the opposition leaders.

They said they wanted it safe, walkable, with multifamily housing. They said they didn't want a station that was just a platform with stairways up and down. They wanted it to be a building that was a 24-hour-a-day mixed-use facility. Out of these meetings, we developed principles that everyone signed on to.

Architects used the principles to create a new design for the Pulaski station, which the community coalition unveiled in July 1993. About 10 days later, the transit authority dropped its plan to kill the Green Line and pledged to invest some \$300 million in renovating it. “The city did a remarkable about-face,” says Bernstein. “They took dollars from other projects and put them into rebuilding this line.”

Bernstein and his fellow Chicago activists had unprecedented leverage to back up their demands. A clause in a 1991 federal statute, the Intermodal Surface Transportation Efficiency Act (ISTEA), required state, regional, and local public agencies to involve the public in deciding how to spend federal transportation dollars. The community was advocating for the preservation and maintenance of existing government transportation assets, which was one of the federal government's priorities. Ignoring the community's opposition to shutting down the Green Line could have put federal funding at risk.

ISTEA ended the days when departments of transportation could impose their priorities on communities. The law required “early and continuing involvement of the public” and encouraged cooperation in planning and consensus building. It created an opportunity for communities to demand access to decision making. ISTEA, says Pittsburgh regional planner Bob Kochanowski, “changes the rules, moves the competition into a new stadium, drafts new players, and even invites the spectators onto the field.”

The Collaborative Alternative

For decades, government planners have had a typical way of making plans; they decide what should be done, announce their plan, and then defend it from attack. “Decide-announce-defend,” some critics call it. Before ISTEA, for instance, transportation planning was usually about “telling and selling”—tell the public the plan, then sell the public on it.



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These traditional processes often produce persistent opposition, divide the community into warring factions, and make citizens cynical about government, observe Bill Potapchuk and Caroline Polk, advocates of collaborative planning. “Local politics,” they add, “is often characterized by traditionally powerful organizations proposing major projects, proposals which then become mired in controversy as they provide convenient targets for newly organized and ongoing citizen and activist groups. Such conflicts often drag on for years, productive outcomes stymied by lawsuits and a ‘winner take all’ approach.”

The alternative is to try collaborative planning, which cures the “We’re the government, you’re not” syndrome by giving citizens and community groups a share of the decision-making power. In traditional planning processes, citizens are invited to attend hearings where they may comment on plans, and a specific period is set aside for gathering comments. The views offered on these occasions may influence government decision makers—especially if 1,000 people show up to express them. But a public hearing is a process “owned” by the government, and it is rarely a dialogue. When controversial issues are on the agenda, it usually becomes an invitation for people to yell louder, to get angrier, to emphasize their disagreements—all to get the attention of government decision makers. In contrast, collaborative planning is an invitation to the people with a stake in the outcome of the planning—community groups, interested individuals, and government officials—to come together and jointly make decisions.

Collaborative planning is being used by all levels of government to develop all manner of plans. In cities such as Hampton and Richmond, Virginia, Indianapolis, Charlotte, and Seattle, city government is collaborating with neighborhood groups to develop city and neighborhood plans. The federal government required collaborative planning by communities applying for empowerment zone status. Some regulatory agencies, such as the Environmental Protection Agency, use collaborative planning to avoid problems with controversial rules they are developing. In a process called negotiated rule making, or “reg-neg,” they bring stakeholders together to work out aspects of draft regulations that have the potential to create conflict among them. “By consulting with the parties,” say Potapchuk and Polk, “agencies using reg-neg have been able to substantially reduce their litigation and other costs associated with rule promulgation.”

In general, collaborative planning increases stakeholder and community acceptance of plans, because people have had a hand in making the plan. This boosts the chance that plans will be implemented, since the possibility of lawsuits and other delaying tactics by opponents is reduced. Hence a collaborative planning process may take longer and cost more than a traditional planning process does, but it can save a community time and money in the



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long run.

Collaborative plans are often better plans, too, because they are informed by the diverse experiences and knowledge of the many stakeholders involved. The very process of collaborative planning also creates other benefits, such as healing or preventing rifts in the community. It may even increase a community's collaborative capacity, by building trust, strong relationships, and people with collaborative skills. This can help solve or even prevent problems in the future, saving time and money in the process.

BARRIERS TO CONSENSUS BUILDING

An excellent guidebook on community decision making, *Involving Citizens in Community Decision Making*, describes some of the attitudes that are barriers to effective consensus building:

“Someone has to lose.” “The truth is, when people have to work together over time, if you ‘win’ at the expense of someone else losing, all you’ve done is plant the seeds for the next conflict. Resentment builds. People want to get back at you. . . . The premise behind collaborative problem solving is that it is possible to come up with a solution that meets everybody’s needs. There may not need to be any losers.”

“If we’ve got the votes, we’ve got the power.” “After an election, groups may gloat over the fact that they’ve got a one-vote majority on a city council or county commission. Their glee may be short-lived. The truth is that when governing bodies are badly divided, they often vote on issues only to find that in actuality they haven’t the power to make their decision happen. . . . One-vote victories often bog down in a quagmire of challenges and new requirements.”

“Building a consensus takes too long.” “You can make a decision fast by majority vote, but you may never be able to implement the decision. Or the cost of implementation may be so high that you’ll wish you never got involved. There’s little doubt that it takes longer to build a consensus before making a decision. The cost of *making* the decision will be higher. But the costs *resulting from* the decision may be much lower.”

Elements of Collaborative Planning

Collaborative planning is not a highly predictable process. It can take days or years, depending on what is being decided and who is involved in making decisions. It can cost very little or hundreds of thousands of dollars. Yet some steps are common to collaborative planning in most situations:

1. **Identify the stakeholders and invite their participation.**

In most communities, stakeholders fall into three categories, notes Bill



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Potapchuk, a veteran of collaborative planning processes:

- People who are formally responsible for making the decision.
- People affected by or concerned about the potential outcome.
- People who can block or ensure a potential outcome, such as city council members, newspaper publishers, or watchdog organizations.

To be an inclusive process, collaborative planning should draw broadly from these three categories; everyone who wants to participate should have an opportunity.

There are many techniques for getting stakeholders informed and involved. Some communities survey residents to identify their concerns. (Some of these pay residents, rather than a company, to conduct the surveys, so they get engaged in the process.) Some communities use town hall meetings, which can be televised. Some do formal outreach to community-based organizations and churches. Others use the media to publicize the process, including public service announcements and cutout coupons to elicit responses.

2. Secure agreement among participants about the planning process that will be used.

This is crucial, because the point of collaborative planning is to create satisfaction with the *process* of planning as well as with the *content* of the plan. From the outset, the participants must agree on what is fair as far as the process goes. This may require some give-and-take. To get things going, government officials may want to propose a process, but they must be ready to modify or even abandon it in the face of community desires.

In other words, share power right from the beginning by designing the process together. This will help strengthen relationships at the early stages of the process, which will pay off later when disputes must be resolved. It is easy to deride this as “planning to plan,” and some stakeholders will urge that you “get on with the planning.” But this would be a mistake, because the planning process must be subject to the approval of the participants. Do not proceed without it.

3. Plan together.

For planning to be collaborative, all participants must share the same information. They must share basic understandings and definitions. They must work together on problems, then identify the options and select which ones they will pursue. During this process, the stakeholders should engage in face-to-face dialogue, negotiation, and problem solving.

To facilitate this, you should offer stakeholders many ways of becoming involved in the process and getting information: by serving on committees, at-

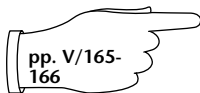


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tending meetings, providing written feedback, and the like.

4. Make decisions by consensus.

This is the heart of community empowerment in planning. A plan is not a plan until all the stakeholders agree that it is. If the process gets stuck or falls apart because a consensus cannot be achieved, use a facilitator or mediator to get things moving again. If that doesn't work, the fallback alternatives include going with a super-majority of the group, approving those items for which there is consensus and holding back the others, or even issuing a minority report. Another method, which might be called a "default agreement," was used by one county working on new ordinances. At the beginning of the consensus-building process, says Bill Potapchuk, a written draft of the new ordinances was presented and the stakeholders agreed that if they failed to reach a consensus, that draft would be automatically adopted.



Collaborative Planning: Lessons Learned

As we have explained concerning community empowerment in general, it is critical to go beyond rounding up the usual suspects when developing a community-based planning process. Diversity improves the quality of the dialogue and helps develop broad community buy-in. In addition, some lessons apply specifically to collaborative planning processes:

1. Build capacity in your community to conduct collaborative planning.

In most communities, few people know how to design and manage collaborative planning processes. So when a community decides to use collaborative planning, it tends to look for an out-of-town expert. That's not the first place to look, says one of those experts. Instead, check out the local possibilities. "If the choice is between using a consultant like me to run a planning process," says Bill Potapchuk of the Program for Community Problem Solving, "or finding someone at the community college or somewhere else local, that's a no-brainer." Use the local.

Potapchuk is not trying to put himself out of business; he just recognizes that communities should think about collaborative planning as a community competence—an ability that will be needed not just once for one planning process but over and over again. "The question is how to strategically embed this capacity in your community," he explains.

If there is no capacity in your community, then hook up consultants with local people who want to learn how the work is done. They can develop their skills by serving as apprentices to the process. They won't become instant experts, since collaborative planning is a complex skill. But they will get a real-world taste of it, which can be supplemented with training and coaching.

2. Invest in developing the collaboration skills of government planners.

Most government planners have little familiarity with collaborative plan-



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ning processes, yet they are essential participants in them. They may be called on to play different roles: designing entire planning processes, facilitating meetings, resolving conflicts, or negotiating on behalf of the government's interests.

You can turn to others in government to develop these skills as well. You may want to develop a cross-functional team: a group of individuals with complementary skills—such as facilitation, process design, and conflict resolution—who work together. This may even break down some of the categorical boundaries that often stymie cooperation within government.

3. Don't try to solve tough, controversial issues right away.

Every community has its hot-button issues, concerns that are divisive and explosive. They have to be tackled sooner or later, but if you are just launching collaborative planning, later is better. "Immediate controversial issues tend to overshadow longer-term planning," observes Mutsumi Mizuno of the Environmental Action Foundation. It's more important to build early momentum for the planning process than to tackle tougher issues and risk getting bogged down.

4. Fund community groups to provide planning services.

Governments are increasingly turning to community groups to manage collaborative planning exercises. Oakland, California, awarded a community development corporation, the Spanish-Speaking Unity Council (SSUC), \$185,000 to plan the redevelopment of a Bay Area Rapid Transit station. SSUC met with community leaders and held a design symposium on a Saturday to give community members a chance to express their ideas.

If the community group has good local connections and credibility, it may be able to generate significant community participation. This can go wrong, however, if the community group tries to advance its own agenda rather than facilitate the community's dialogue or if it fails to draw many different stakeholders into the process.

RESOURCES ON COLLABORATIVE PLANNING

William R. Potapchuk and Caroline G. Polk. *Building the Collaborative Community*. Washington, D.C.: National Institute for Dispute Resolution, 1994. An excellent description of various collaborative planning and dispute resolution cases and the basic principles of using this tool.

Program for Community Problem Solving. Established in 1988 and cosponsored by the National League of Cities, the American Chamber of Commerce Executives, the International City/County Management Association, the International Downtown Association, and the National Civic League, this organization

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offers training, presentations, technical assistance, coaching, facilitation, information, and publications about collaborative approaches for communities. Based in Washington, D.C. Phone: (202) 783–2961. Address: 915 15th St., N.W., Suite 600, Washington DC 20005.

Urban Land Institute. *Pulling Together: A Planning and Development Consensus-Building Manual*. Washington, D.C.: Urban Land Institute, 1994. ULI Catalogue No. P90. A detailed workbook, focused mainly on building community participation in processes.

COMMUNITY-BASED FUNDING

Community-Based Funding provides revenues to empowered community groups, either directly from government revenues or through the power to generate their own funds.

All too often in community empowerment, the community gets the power but not the purse. “One of the most common failures in governance is allowing a ‘disconnect’ between the fiscal strategy and the program strategy,” note analysts at the Center for the Study of Social Policy. Many community-based organizations find that funding is their Achilles’ heel. They constantly scramble to assemble sufficient revenues from a patchwork of sources: federal, state, and local government grants or contracts; grants and loans from foundations or community-minded corporations and philanthropists; and capital raised from the community itself. For some empowered entities this may not be a big barrier, if they require only small amounts of money or do not intend to stay in business for many years. But those tackling long-term community issues need a more secure funding base.

In 1967, Robert F. Kennedy, then a senator from New York, helped launch a community development organization for the Bedford-Stuyvesant neighborhood of Brooklyn. This entity was the first prototype for the community development corporation (CDC), which rehabilitates and builds housing; provides social services, job training, and adult education; and invests in business development and commercial real estate—all in low-income neighborhoods and communities. By the 1990s, there were more than 2,000 CDCs operating nationwide; they had developed more than 320,000 units of affordable housing.

Like most empowered community entities, CDCs generate their funds from a variety of sources. Grants from foundations played a major role in developing the early CDCs and in starting up many more; in the 1960s and 1970s the Ford Foundation invested more than \$100 million to develop them. CDCs



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also make money in the private marketplace—from renters of housing units and from businesses repaying loans. The New Community Corporation in Newark, New Jersey, runs six for-profit businesses, rents 2,500 apartments, and employs more than 1,000 people, for example. CDCs receive funds from government agencies that contract with them to provide services. And finally, the federal government's tax credit for investment in low-income housing development has stimulated the flow of billions of dollars into CDC projects.

Thus, community development corporations demonstrate four ways that empowered community organizations can be funded:

- By grants from philanthropic sources.
- By revenues from their businesses (an approach more and more are using).
- By contracts or grants from government.
- By private investors lured by government incentives.

A fifth method is for government to grant the community entity the power to tax. Many cities and states, for instance, give business owners the right to tax themselves (in addition to paying existing taxes) to raise money to spruce up their business districts, through business improvement districts. In 1998, Missouri went a step further, approving a law that allows community organizations to create “community improvement districts” that can impose and collect taxes to provide services or pay for capital improvements. The local government must approve the creation of the district.

Using a taxing district can generate a more secure revenue stream. In East Lansing, Michigan, merchants in the downtown were having trouble competing against big shopping centers that had been built in the suburbs. “Our merchants’ group raised about \$13,000 in their best year to market the downtown stores,” says Jim van Ravensway, the city planner. “The malls have \$500,000 budgets and marketing staff. It’s just no comparison.” So the city took advantage of a state statute to create a downtown management board of businesses. The nine-member board collects a special assessment against downtown property owners, which amounts to about \$60,000 a year, to spend on marketing the stores. “That’s not a lot, but it’s a fourfold leap,” van Ravensway points out. Most businesses pay the assessment (unless the property owner doesn’t pass the charge on to them), whereas no more than 20 percent of them contributed voluntarily in the past.

Community-Based Funding: Lessons Learned

1. It doesn't always require a lot of money to fuel the empowerment engine.

A little money can go a long way. In Baltimore, the city took \$20,000 it received from a Ford Foundation award and used it to provide \$500 grants for



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community development projects designed by inner-city residents. Other communities, such as Indianapolis and Multnomah County, Oregon, have also tried these mini-grant programs to get many small projects done. They help build enthusiasm for empowerment, and they strengthen the relationship between government and the community. The key is to avoid bureaucratizing the program; attach minimal strings and paperwork to the small grants.

Still, if you want to accomplish big things through community empowerment, it will take larger amounts of money. And quite realistically, such money is hard for community groups to come by.

2. Transform government budgeting to make it community-friendly.

As we emphasized earlier, governments must change to become better partners for empowered community entities. This is especially true of their budgeting systems, which typically use categorical funding streams that earmark separate funds for distinct purposes. Narrow line item budgets make it hard to assemble funding for broad-based efforts to solve community problems.

In Iowa, the state created “decategorization boards” to solve this problem. These boards of county and community leaders develop plans to help at-risk children. The state, meanwhile, acts as a banker for each board. It pools together different departments’ funds and then disburses money to the counties to implement the boards’ plans. This allows the local planners to escape from the categorical imperatives in the state budget. In addition, “decat boards” are allowed to carry their unspent funds across fiscal years.

3. Tap into and build indigenous resources.

Communities can raise donations from individuals or community organizations, such as block clubs, parent groups, churches, synagogues, and civic organizations. Most community-based organizations are old hands at this sort of fund-raising.

One type of community-based organization, the community foundation, raises money so it can provide funding to other community-based organizations. The number of community foundations in the U.S. has grown to more than 500; they hold more than \$20 billion in assets. Most of the money they attract from local philanthropists goes into their endowments, which are invested in perpetuity; they use the income from these investments to make grants. “A community endowment works much like a permanent collective savings account where the specified community determines how to distribute the earned interest,” explains Janet Topolsky, associate director of the Aspen Institute’s Community Strategies Group.

Although community foundations traditionally get their money from wealthy individuals, some of these philanthropies mobilize even the poorest of communities to generate endowment funds. In sparsely populated Daniels



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County in northeast Montana, communities raised an astonishing \$1 million for a community endowment. It was an intense effort, Topolsky reports:

The fundraising effort itself has required a comprehensive countywide education effort about endowments, using the newspaper, the radio, public forums, and one-on-one meetings. . . . Fundraising efforts are bringing people out of the woodwork and building community peer pressure and social capital, as “paper a-thon” contributors or radio-thon listeners challenge fellow community members who attended a certain high school or who have a spare bale of hay to “put your asset where your community is.” Children’s piggy bank donations and teenagers’ yard work and babysitting pledges or help at community gatherings are as highly valued as the larger gifts made by trust benefactors, giving these younger residents both pride and stature in the community.

4. Look for “hidden” funds.

Money already allocated but not put to use is another potential source of funding for community entities. In 1999, the Corporation for Enterprise Development (CFED), a “think-and-do tank” focused on economic development, reported that hundreds of millions of dollars in investment capital for local and state economic development were going unused. The money is held by what CFED calls “revolving loan funds,” which are public, quasi-public, private, or community-based financial institutions that make loans to local businesses that cannot attract traditional financing. “There’s a significant amount of underutilized capital in these institutions,” says Andrea Levere, CFED’s vice president. “In Minnesota, for example, we found \$202 million in capital—and \$91 million just sitting around.” Other examples of “hidden funds” that community groups may be able to get permission to tap include the unclaimed property funds held by governments for people they can’t find, unclaimed bank accounts, and sales of assets seized from criminals, such as drug dealers’ cars and yachts.

RESOURCE ON COMMUNITY-BASED FUNDING

The Corporation for Enterprise Development (CFED). A nonprofit organization, CFED focuses primarily on “asset-building” strategies for low-income and distressed communities. It is a seedbed of many innovative policies and ideas about community-based economic development. Its 1999 publication *Ideas in Development* describes many of these ideas. Contact CFED at 777 North Capital Street, N.E., Suite 410, Washington DC 20002. Phone: (202) 408-9788. Web: www.cfed.org.



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Notes

All quotations that are not attributed in the text or in these endnotes are from interviews with the authors or their associates. Only in cases where there might be some confusion about the source of a quotation have we indicated in a note that it came from an interview.

Chapter Nineteen

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