

**Innovations in Philanthropy: The Skillman
Foundation's A Call to Service (ACTS) Faith-Based
Initiative¹**

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I. BACKGROUND

History

The vision for churches collaborating to provide programs for the children of Detroit was born in the mind of William J. Beckham, Jr., president of the Skillman Foundation from 1999 until his untimely death at the age of 59 in the spring of 2000. After Mr. Beckham's death, the Foundation continued to pursue his vision and developed a five year project named the "A Call to Service" (ACTS) Faith-Based Initiative.

The Pre-Initiative Planning

The formal planning process for the ACTS Initiative began in the fall of 2000. The Foundation assembled a planning committee comprised of Foundation staff and leaders of several Detroit area churches and other faith-based organizations. These leaders and the staff of the Foundation worked to shape the purpose, vision, mission, goals, and the design of the Initiative. Below we present the key components of the Initiative (Skillman Foundation memo dated December 19, 2000).

Purpose: *The stated purpose of the ACTS Initiative was, "to increase the resources available in neighborhoods for children by increasing the partners with the Skillman Foundation who work on behalf of children. Faith-based organizations bring many resources to communities including volunteers, facilities and finances. Many are already engaged in work in their neighborhoods on behalf of children and youth. The capacity to initiate, continue and sustain this work varies among different faith-based organizations. The Skillman Foundation would like to build and enhance the capacity of faith-based organizations to do this work."*

Vision: *The vision for the ACTS Initiative that the planning committee crafted was, "Faith-Based organizations in the city of Detroit and surrounding communities are united in their work in neighborhoods to support children, youth and their families. The faith-based community provides greater leadership to neighborhood improvements and developments for children and families. Communities are more tolerant, nurturing places for families. Neighborhoods in the city of Detroit are clean, safe, healthy, supportive and fun places for children and youth to grow and develop. Parents are active participants in raising their children and have necessary resources to do so. All children reach their highest potential and fulfill their dreams. More youth graduate from high school, more youth enroll in higher education programs, including technical schools and four year institutions and more youth avail themselves of opportunities that lead them to become healthy productive adults."*

Mission: *The mission of the ACTS Initiative was to, "support the efforts of faith-based organizations as leaders in collaboration with others in their neighborhoods to contribute resources and develop programs that promote the healthy development of children in the city of Detroit and its surrounding communities."*

Goals and Objectives: *The primary goal of the Initiative was to support the healthy development of children. The stated key objectives were: "to develop enriched activities for*

children and youth in the non-school hours and the summer in their neighborhoods, to promote the development of places in neighborhoods that support the activities of children, youth, and their families, to provide support for capacity-building activities that enable faith-based organizations to undertake collaborative projects, to promote an ongoing dialogue on children's issues across faiths and communities, to increase resources available for projects in communities for networking, more funding partners including other foundations, corporations, and public agencies, and evaluate and assess the impact of the initiative over a period of time.” (Skillman Foundation document, “Faith-Based Initiative Framework”, no date; Skillman ACTS Website).

Guiding Principles: In order to focus the core intentions of the Initiative, the planning committee agreed that the Initiative should adhere to eight guiding principles. These principles were as follows:

1. The Initiative would involve faith-based organizations—organizations defined as churches or other houses of worship that demonstrate a commitment to their communities and are located in neighborhoods.
2. Primary geographic focus for the neighborhood youth development programs is the city of Detroit. Faith-based organizations in suburban communities will be engaged in activities like interfaith dialogues.
3. Collaboration among churches will be required. Grants will be made to cluster of churches in neighborhoods to develop projects serving children that live in these neighborhoods. A cluster is defined as at least five faith-based organizations and may include other community based agencies and schools.
4. A faith-based organization will be the lead organization in each cluster.
5. Participation in a series of technical assistances and training workshops will be required for clusters of churches seeking to develop projects.
6. All funded projects will demonstrate commitment to the healthy development of children and youth in their neighborhoods.
7. Grants will only be made to the non-profit organizations of faith-based organizations. Grants will not be made directly to churches or other houses of worship.
8. Evaluation of the Initiative will be conducted to assess the effectiveness of the strategy and ultimately improving outcomes for children and youth.

Implementation strategy: In addition to the vision, mission, goals, and guiding principles, the planning committee designed a strategy to take the Initiative from concept to reality. The Initiative was conceived of as a five year project with a total budget up to \$5 million. The implementation of the Initiative included the following components:

1. An environmental scan to assess the number of faith-based organizations in Detroit and the extent to which they provide after-school programs. The environmental scan was also intended to identify resources and gaps in services to children and youth.
2. An advisory board to advise the Foundation during the implementation of the Initiative. The advisory board included those clergy and lay leaders that participated in the planning process and other individuals who brought expertise to the development and implementation of the Initiative. The stated roles of the advisory committee were as

follows: to provide expertise to the development of the faith-based initiative, to advise Foundation staff on the protocols of the faith-based community, to assist with the outreach and networking for cluster recruitment and identification, to provide oversight and comment in development of materials to be disseminated, to serve as a liaison and link between the Initiative and the faith-based community, to serve as an advocate and spokesperson on behalf of the Initiative, to provide expertise in the review of cluster formation and proposals submitted for funding consideration, to attend regularly scheduled meetings of the advisory committee, and to serve as a general resource to assist foundation staff as the Initiative evolved (Skillman document, no date).

3. Technical assistance provided to the participating organizations to build their capacities to design, implement, and evaluate non-school hour programs. The technical assistance was designed to be provided in two phases. The first phase was intended to be provided to organizations interested in being a part of the Initiative. The content of the technical assistance was to address the goals and objectives of the Initiative, proposal development, collaboration, program development and implementation, and evaluation. The second phase of technical assistance was to be provided to organizations that received funding to participate in the Initiative. This phase was intended to include ongoing workshops to build organizational capacity, including board development, fiscal operations, program planning and fundraising. This phase was also intended to help interested faith-based organizations to obtain their 501(c)3 status, where appropriate.
4. As an Initiative of the Foundation, ACTS would be directed and monitored by the staff of the Foundation, rather than by an intermediary organization or other grantee. Consultants would be used in an advisory role to Foundation staff and to assist in selected aspects of the Initiative such as the implementation of the environmental scan, provision of technical assistance, and evaluation.
5. Interfaith dialogues that would promote an ongoing dialogue on children's issues across faiths and communities.
6. Grant-making to "clusters" of churches or other houses of worship to develop non-school hour programs for children and youth was a central component of the ACTS Initiative. (It should be noted that although the Initiative was open to all religious groups, ultimately only Christian churches participated) During the first year of the Initiative, grants were to be made to clusters of churches in four neighborhoods to develop, expand, or enhance programs. Future grant-making in additional neighborhoods was to be made based upon lessons learned from the results of the initial grants.
7. Evaluation of the process, outcomes and impact of the Initiative was seen as critical to the improvement of the Initiative and the assessment of its success. Key outcomes that the Initiative was designed to accomplish and that the evaluation would assess included the following:
 - More churches or other houses of worship would operate after-school programs
 - More churches would develop a commitment to helping children in their communities and the city of Detroit
 - Leaders of faith-based organizations and their congregations would develop an understanding of issues related to children and youth

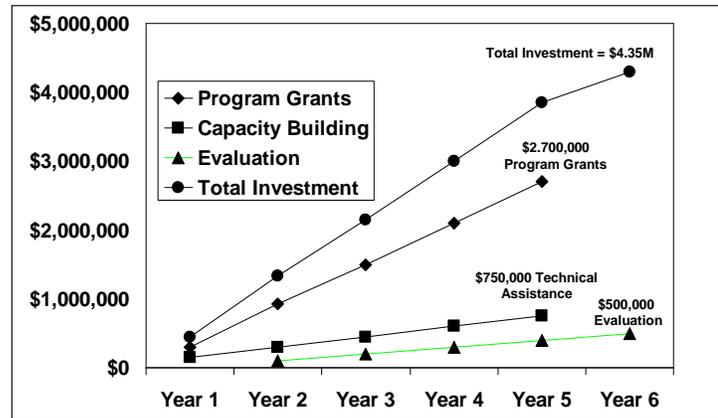
- More grants would be made to faith-based organizations seeking to improve outcomes for children
- More churches would receive technical assistance and training on the development of nonprofit organizations, board development and financial management of outside funds
- More child-friendly spaces, especially churches or other houses of worship, would support the development of children
- More children and youth would be provided high quality after-school programs
- More partnerships would exist between churches or other houses of worship and other community stakeholders within targeted communities
- Increased advocacy on behalf of children's issues
- The number of faith-based organizations with non-profit entities would increase

II. IMPLEMENTATION AND OUTCOMES

In February of 2001 the Board of Trustees of the Skillman Foundation approved the funding and implementation of the A Call to Service (ACTS) Faith-Based Initiative. The ACTS Initiative was officially launched April 27, 2001 at the Detroit Yacht Club. The ACTS kickoff event was attended by numerous Detroit clergy, business, government, and community leaders. The keynote speaker was Reverend Dr. Floyd Flake, pastor of the 23,000 member Greater Allen African Methodist Episcopal Cathedral of New York and president of Wilberforce University. The purpose of the ACTS kickoff event was to announce the Initiative to Detroit's faith-community, to attract potential participants, and to pay tribute to the vision and leadership of William Beckham that laid its foundation.

Between 2001 and 2006, the Skillman Foundation invested over \$4 million in the ACTS Initiative. This investment included \$750,000 to build the organizational capacity of more than 80 churches and \$2.7 million in grants to over 50 faith-based organizations to provide after school and summer programs. Figure 1 shows the allocation of the Foundation's investment over the course of the Initiative.

Figure 1. Skillman Foundation ACTS Financial Investment (2001 – 2006)



As a result of the Foundations investment, more than 50 congregations and other faith- and community-based organizations came together to provide nearly 8300 after-school and summer program slots for children in the City of Detroit. Below we discuss the implementation and outcomes of the ACTS Initiative. More specifically, we describe the strategy the Foundation used to increase the capacity of the participating congregations, the efforts of the congregations and their partners to collaborate to design, implement, and evaluate their programs and finally, the results of their efforts.

Figure 2 summarizes the ACTS logic model. The purpose of the logic model was to clarify the linkages between the investments made into in the Initiative (i.e., inputs), the work that was done to enhance the congregations’ capacity, collaboration, and delivery of high quality after school programs (i.e., activities), the observable “products” of these activities (i.e., outputs), and the results of the Initiative in terms of its meeting its goals and objectives (i.e., outcomes). Below we highly the key components of the ACTS Initiative and briefly summarize the process and selected outcomes.

A. Capacity Building—Process and Outcomes

Capacity Definition: *“The ability of churches, individually and collectively to plan, implement communicate, evaluate, fund, and expand programs that benefit the children of Detroit.”*

Desired Outcomes: *“1) More churches would receive technical assistance and training on the development of nonprofit organizations, board development, and financial management of outside funds. 2) Leaders of faith-based organizations and their congregations would develop an understanding of issues related to*

children and youth. 3) More grants would be made to faith-based organizations seeking to improve outcomes for children.”

Capacity Building Summary

The ACTS desired capacity building outcomes were, to varying degrees, met. For example, over the course of the Initiative, more than 80 churches received direct hands-on training and several thousand individuals participated in one or more of the ACTS training and capacity building activities (e.g., Cluster Forum, Pastors Forum, Showcase Forum, Funders Forum, etc.).

As the Initiative progressed, the number of clusters and organizations increased, the quality of the proposals submitted was better, the timeliness of audits and other required documentation submissions improved, the amount of money raised increased and the organizations that comprised the ACTS Initiative are, by and large, stronger today than when the Initiative started. Qualitative assessments obtained from participants themselves also suggest that the capacity of the ACTS participants improved over time.

FIGURE 2. A Call to Service Logic Model

Mission: To support the efforts of faith-based organizations as leaders in collaboration with others in their neighborhoods to contribute resources and develop programs that promote the healthy development of children in the city of Detroit and its surrounding communities.

Inputs	Activities	Outputs	Desired Outcomes	Actual Outcomes
<p>Skillman Foundation</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Initiative Vision Board of Trustees commitment of up to \$5M for a five year faith-based initiative Staff time <p>Advisory Board</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Pastoral Leadership Paid and volunteer staff time Faith, business, government, and community relationships and connections <p>Requirements</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Collaboration—of 5 or more congregations Collaboration would include a faith-based 501c3 with annual budget of at least \$100,000 to serve as grantee Participation in required technical assistance (TA) and training Provide after school programs for children Programs offered in neighborhoods where children being served live 	<p>Initiative Development and Implementation</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Develop mission statement, goals, objectives, guiding principles, and implementation strategy Plan and implement ACTS kickoff event Provide Initiative oversight and monitoring <p>Provide grants for capacity building</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Issue RFP, review applications, and select TA/Training providers Commission evaluation, identify and select evaluator <p>Provide grants for collaborative after-school programs</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Issue RFP, review proposals, and provide grants for after school programs to “clusters” of faith-based organizations 	<p>Grant Making</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> \$2.73M for program grants \$450K for challenge grants \$750k for technical assistance and training \$500k for evaluation \$4.43M total investment <p>Capacity Building Activities</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Provided over 4000 hours of technical assistance and training, topics included: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> After school program design, implementation, and evaluation Organizational development Collaboration Strategic Planning Fund Development Community Outreach Volunteer Mobilization Staff development Fiscal Operations Staff Development Marketing and Communications Annual Giving Campaigns Integrated Program, Evaluation, and Communication (IPEC) logic models Workshops and special events including: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> 2 Funders Forum 2 Pastors Forum Cluster Showcases Cluster Forums On-site coaching VISTA volunteers Launched website 	<p>Capacity Outcomes</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> More churches would receive technical assistance and training on the development of nonprofit organizations, board development, financial management of outside funds Leaders of faith-based organizations and their congregations would develop an understanding of issues related to children and youth More grants would be made to faith-based organizations seeking to improve outcomes for children <p>Collaboration Outcomes</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> More partnerships would exist between churches and other community stakeholders within targeted communities <p>Programming Outcomes</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> More churches operating after school programs More churches developing a commitment to helping children in their communities and the city of Detroit 	<p>Actual Capacity Outcomes</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> 82 churches participated in TA and training workshops 55 pastors/church leaders attended Pastors Forum to learn about ACTS and children and youth issues 102 persons and 12 grantmakers participated in Funders Forum Enhanced capacity evidenced by improved proposal quality, timely grant and financial audit submission, completion of strategic plans Churches acquired additional \$560K for programs Cluster began capacity building program for other organizations Vanguard CDC received \$.5M to develop a charter school MNP received \$750k Compassionate Capital Fund grant to expand capacity building <p>Actual Collaboration Outcomes</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> 8 groups of churches (55 total) collaborated with each other, with government, non-profits, and universities to form neighborhood centered “clusters” to provide after-school programs New 501(c)3 created—Agape Village, Inc. was formed Project Potential has submitted articles of incorporation Clusters participate in City-wide “Mayors Time” program 6 of 8 original clusters have formed ACTS Cluster Collaborative and developed a three-year fund development plan to continue to offer programs post ACTS <p>Actual Programming Outcomes</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> 55 churches provided after-school and summer programs Prior to ACTS few of the churches provided regular after school programs and none did so collaboratively Increased number of individual children served annually from 608 to 2292 8272 after school “slots” provided between 2001 and 2005 Churches contributed an estimated \$16,957,360 in cash, volunteer, and other in-kind support for ACTS programs

In the words of one of the ACTS program directors, *“I’ve grown--I’m more educated now, I’m more rounded. I think I’m complete almost, in this whole effort because--and I thank God for it because I’ve learned a lot about writing proposals and grants and what they all mean and what faith-based really is and what it all really should be about, and I accredit that to the Skillman Foundation for bringing this because it has just made me become more complete and who I believe God wants me to be in this whole approach with children, period. So hats off to you Skillman.”*

B. Collaboration—Process and Outcomes

Collaboration definition: *“Separate organizations forming a new alliance where resources, power and authority are shared and where people are brought together to achieve common goals that could not be accomplished by a single individual organization independently.”*

Desired outcome: *“More partnerships would exist between churches and other community stakeholders within targeted communities.”*

Collaboration Summary

Despite the hard work required to build trust, to develop relationships, and to continue through disagreements, all eight of the clusters managed to stay together over the course of the ACTS Initiative. Taken together, the interview, focus group, assessment tool, and other collaboration-related data suggest that while collaboration among congregations of different denominational, racial, geographic, size, and other lines is certainly a challenge, it is possible. Perhaps the most compelling proof of this assertion is the fact that six of the eight clusters have chosen to remain together, forming the A Call To Service (ACTS) Collaborative. The ACTS Collaborative is working with the Michigan Neighborhood partnership to seek a federal earmark and other funds to support its collaborative work with children in Detroit.

C. Programs—Process and Outcomes

Programming definition: *“The extent to which the after-school programs combine academic, enrichment, cultural and recreational activities to guide learning and engage children in safe environments.”*

Programming outcomes: *1) More churches operating after school programs. 2) More churches developing a commitment to helping children in their communities and the city of Detroit*

Programming Summary

The central purpose of the ACTS Initiative was to build the capacity of congregations to collaboratively offer non-school hour programs for children. The data in this section of the report revealed that the congregations in the ACTS Initiative accomplished this goal. Over the course of five years, eight clusters of more than fifty churches and other faith- and community-based organizations provided after school slots for nearly 8300 young people in Detroit. Perhaps the most impressive part of this accomplishment is that the clusters multiplied the Skillman Foundation’s investment

more than six fold and collectively contributed the equivalent of more than \$16 million dollars in cash, facilities, transportation, and paid and volunteer staff to provide a wide range of after-school, summer, and other non-school programs for children in Detroit.

III. LIMITATIONS OF THE EVALUATION

The evaluation of the ACTS Initiative has at least two important limitations. First, because the Initiative was designed as a demonstration project and not a research project, no effort was made to implement an experimental design, and thus it is not possible to conclude with certainty that the changes that occurred over time were solely the result of the congregations' involvement in the Initiative. More specifically, in the absence of the congregations being randomly selected to participate in the Initiative and then being randomly assigned to experience the various components of the Initiative (i.e., experimental group) or not (i.e., the control group) it is not possible to determine definitively that changes that took place were "caused" by the congregation's involvement in the ACTS Initiative. That said, however, given that most of the congregations in the ACTS Initiative were not working with one another prior to the ACTS Initiative, given that most did not offer after school programs prior to the Initiative, and given that few of the churches had received grant funding from the Skillman Foundation prior to ACTS, in all likelihood, much of the work that was accomplished over the five years of the Initiative was probably at least the indirect, if not direct, result of their involvement in the ACTS Initiative.

A second important limitation of the evaluation is the fact that it began after the Initiative was already under way. Ideally, the evaluation would have been designed and begun prior to the start of the Initiative. Although the evaluation was not designed prior to the start of ACTS, it began relatively early in the process. As a result, many of the evaluation findings were made available to improve the Initiative as it unfolded.

IV. LESSONS LEARNED AND RECOMMENDATIONS

In this, the final section of the report, we summarize a few key lessons that were learned over the five years of the ACTS Initiative and present what we think are some useful principles and practices that others may be able to use to mobilize the potential and power of urban faith-based organizations for the benefit of children.

Capacity Building

An important capacity lesson learned from the ACTS Initiative is the importance of providing adequate training and lead time to initiate collaboration. Past research and the experience of the ACTS Initiative suggests that it takes at least 6-9 months to successfully launch a collaborative non-school hour program. One possible way to begin the collaboration process would be to provide a planning grant to the participating organizations. During the planning period the project's key stakeholders would undergo the kind of capacity building training that the ACTS Initiative offered. They would also use the planning period to conduct a thorough community asset and need assessment. Yet another task to be accomplished during the planning period would be the recruitment of additional members (e.g., schools, churches, service providers) and the identification

of potential partners and funding sources necessary to provide a high quality non-school hour program.

Another important capacity building discovery from the ACTS Initiative was the value of the pre-application training. For congregations and other faith- and community-based organizations that do not have experience in program planning, proposal writing, evaluation, fiscal management, and the other organizational aspects of offering programming to children, preparation for submitting a fundable proposal is critical. This preparation would also be an excellent use of time during a planning period as discussed in the paragraph above.

Still another promising practice that the ACTS Initiative used that would be helpful for future capacity building efforts is the provision of technical assistance and training to organizations that are not successful in their first attempt to receive funding. Being denied funding, particularly without detailed feedback on how to improve one's proposal is disheartening, particularly for individuals and groups without experience in the proposal writing process. Providing organizations that did not submit fundable proposals detailed feedback and additional technical assistance and training was an excellent investment of the Skillman Foundation's resources, resulting in four successful submissions the second year of the Initiative.

Another promising practice that we learned over the course of the Initiative was to provide participants models and templates of required reports and documents (e.g., budgets, evaluation reports, etc.). In order to standardize the ACTS participants' proposals and to ensure that they provided the information that the Foundation, the technical assistance and training team, and the evaluators needed to facilitate the operation of the Initiative, the clusters were trained and given formatted computer files to complete with their own information. Feedback from participants who received these templates was extremely positive, and their use greatly improved the quality and consistency of the proposals and reporting.

A capacity building practice that foundations and other funding sources might consider is providing multi-year grants but requiring recipients to submit proposals to other funders as a requirement for continued funding. This strategy might reduce some of the annual anxiety that the clusters experienced with regard to whether or not their programs would be able to continue, while at the same time helping to build capacity and, ideally, the sustainability of the project through the receipt of other funds.

In sum, the provision of multiple technical assistance and training opportunities and tools are important ACTS innovations that future efforts might want to consider as they attempt to build the capacity of congregations with limited experience in proposal and project development. In addition to tailored training and tools, future faith-based capacity building efforts might also want to use the ACTS strategy of connecting capacity building to actual opportunities for funding. Most proposal development training is an academic exercise that is disconnected from specific funding. The training provided through the ACTS Initiative, however, provided a hands-on "real world"

opportunity to use what was being learned in the classroom to apply for a \$75,000 grant to be awarded in less than a month after the grant was submitted. Future efforts to increase the capacity of congregations should learn from and build upon these and other lessons gleaned from the ACTS Initiative.

Collaboration

In many ways the ACTS Initiative was an experiment that some thought would fail. The expectation of failure hinged around the perception that churches of different denominational, theological, racial, geographic, and gender of leadership could not be coerced, albeit it subtly, to work together. The evaluation findings suggest that while the process of congregational collaboration is not easy, it is possible. One important lesson learned by the ACTS Initiative is that collaboration is definitely a process and not an event. Relationships characterized by trust, mutual support, and commitment take time to build. As mentioned above, the quick time frame in which some applicants had to build their collaborations and submit their proposals probably effectively mobilized cluster members to get work done, but in the long-run it probably interfered with the quality of collaboration, particularly in the short-run.

Another important lesson learned is that collaborative relationships are built first and foremost between individuals not organizations. Clusters that functioned well were those in which the leaders—particularly the steering committee members, the grantee, and the program directors, got along well and were in regular communication. Often these key leaders included the pastors of the cluster churches and their wives—many of whom filled key administrative roles in the clusters (e.g., grantees). Future collaborations that seek to involve congregations, particularly urban African American congregations, should engage the pastors of those congregations as early and as often as possible. Pastors, particularly in the larger predominantly African American denominations (e.g., Baptist, Church of God In Christ) often have tremendous authority and autonomy with regard to the direction and involvement of their congregations in any endeavor. The support of the senior pastor (who is typically male) and his wife will often determine whether a specific program or initiative will flourish or flounder. If the project has the wholehearted support of the pastor it becomes a priority with regard to full access to the human, financial, and physical resources of that particular church and thus has an increased likelihood to be sustainable, even after funding from a foundation or other external sources is gone. (Is there any data or information on the extent that these clusters (I realize six out of eight formed the ACTS Collaborative) have been able to sustain and continue to provide after school programs after the Skillman funding and involvement ceased?)

Yet another important collaboration lesson learned from the ACTS Initiative is that the organizational structure and the roles and responsibilities of cluster members should be defined clearly prior to beginning a collaborative project. Although the general roles (e.g., steering committee, grantee) for key members of the ACTS clusters were prescribed prior to the launch of the Initiative, how those roles operated in practice was left to the individual discretion of each cluster. As a result, there was, on occasion, a lack of clarity, and even some conflict regarding who had what authority to make what

decisions. As a result of this lack of clarity and a various misunderstandings, a number of clusters experienced a significant level of organizational turnover. In clusters in which relationships had been built and in which roles and responsibilities were clear, organizational retention was high and the work of the cluster proceeded with greater harmony.

Despite some bumps along the way, the congregations and clusters of the ACTS Initiative demonstrated that people of faith and their congregations can work together, across their differences, to accomplish something greater than they could accomplish alone. The reality of the condition of Detroit's youth and the congregations' shared commitment to meet the needs of children was large enough for the majority of the ACTS clusters to make their own desires and interests secondary to their mission to serve children through the delivery of non-school hour programs. The formation of the ACTS Collaborative by six of the eight original clusters testifies to the power of collaboration to change lives, not only of children, but also of adults who care for and about them. As one grantee powerfully stated, *"When I sit around a room like this or when I sit at a meeting with the ____ cluster and know that each and every one of us is sitting at that table with one objective, the healthy development of our kids, and no matter what, whatever we can do amongst ourselves to accomplish that goal, it's the most inspiring, humbling experience that I've ever had in my entire life."*

Programming

We think that one of the most important lessons learned from the ACTS Initiative, particularly for funders, is that congregations, particularly when working together, are an excellent investment of resources focused on serving kids. In many ways, congregations are ideally, if not uniquely suited for programs like the ACTS Initiative. For example, churches are physically nested in communities, children are a focus of their missions, most have spaces for education, recreation, and other youth friendly activities, and they are typically comprised of persons with a range of experience and expertise that can be tapped to benefit kids. Recognizing the resources and potential of congregations, the Skillman Foundation used the offer of capacity building and funding to harness the collective power of Detroit congregations. In turn, participants in the ACTS Initiative multiplied the Foundation's investment six fold. In fact, the clusters actually increased the number of children that they served each year despite the fact that their level of funding from the Foundation was held constant.

Perhaps another lesson for funders is the benefit of a neighborhood-centered requirement of collaboration. This approach, at least potentially, minimized competition within the community for funding and the associated animosity that may have resulted if Church A received funding but Church B, located down the block, did not. Additionally, given sufficient time and motivation to build genuine collaboration, congregations appear to be able offer a wide range of opportunities for young people and to bring in other key community partners (e.g., schools) that are focused on working with young people.

Like many after school programs, the clusters had challenges in the area of personnel. High turnover rates, difficulty retaining volunteers, and the need for training

of youth workers were issues of concern across clusters. In fact, a number of program directors, pastors, and others commented that many volunteers were willing to work with young people but they lacked the training and experience to be effective. Future efforts to provide programs for young people should focus on offering high quality replicable training and excellent systems to accomplish the fundamental work of the after school programs. Similar to the need for high quality staff training is the need for well developed curricula and training on its implementation. Although every program cannot be standardized, excellent research-based curricular materials do exist for common after school program activities like reading, violence prevention, and other important academic and life skills.

V. SUMMARY

In sum, the focus of the ACTS Initiative was on providing non-school hour programs for children, in their neighborhoods, provided by collaborations of congregations. The Initiative invested \$2.7 in programs delivered by more than 50 Detroit congregations. In return, over a five year period, the congregations invested the equivalent of over \$16 million to provide nearly 8300 after school spots for children in Detroit. Given the stated mission and goals of the ACTS Initiative, it appears to have been a success. Based on these results, congregations, foundations, policy makers, and others who are concerned about the health and well being of young people might also consider investing in the lives of children by investing in the capacity of the nation's faith and community based organizations.

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