

**SUPPORTING COMMUNITY CHANGE:  
LESSONS FROM THE DISCOVERY INITIATIVE  
ON THE ROLE AND CONTRIBUTIONS OF COMMUNITY LIAISONS**

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**For the William Caspar Graustein Memorial Fund**

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This report was prepared for the William Caspar Graustein Memorial Fund as part of the evaluation of the Discovery Initiative. The information and findings in this report reflect the experiences with community liaisons in the Initiative.

The information used in this report was collected between 2005 and mid-2009. Further details on the data collection are presented in Appendix C in the report.

I appreciate the input and feedback of the Memorial Fund staff, the members and staff of the Discovery community collaborative groups, and especially the community liaisons who so generously shared their experiences and reflections with the evaluation many times. Special thanks to Donna Studdiford of On Point Consulting, a member of the Discovery Initiative evaluation team, for sharing her perspectives on the liaison experience and providing a careful read-through. The analyses and conclusions in this report reflect solely my perspective.

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## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Funders – whether philanthropies, other non-profit organizations, or public entities – face a number of challenges in supporting communities in making deep, meaningful, and sustained change for the well-being of individuals and families who live there. Funder-sponsored community change initiatives can present potential challenges that may affect success – managing the work, bridging power differences between funders and communities, balancing consistency with responsiveness, and supporting community capacity building. The Discovery Initiative, sponsored by the William Caspar Graustein Memorial Fund, provides the opportunity to examine how one approach – the use of community liaisons – has been implemented and the extent of its success in meeting the challenges of foundation-community partnership and in helping manage a multi-community initiative.

The Discovery Initiative, sponsored by the William Caspar Graustein Memorial Fund, is a multi-year effort to catalyze policy, practice, and processes at the local and state levels in support of early childhood education in communities across Connecticut. Beginning in 2002, the Initiative engaged 49 Connecticut communities (now 54) as well as statewide and regional advocacy, research, and policy organizations in pursuing specific objectives related to early care and education and early childhood development. The Initiative also intended to support sustained community-level and statewide focus on early childhood issues and the capacity to continue to influence policy on behalf of young children.

In addition to technical assistance workshops and materials, each community was assigned an individual consultant, called a community liaison. Each liaison was responsible for four to ten communities. The liaison acted as an information link between the Memorial Fund and the Discovery community and across communities by collecting and sharing lessons learned. The liaison was also a resource, and in some circumstances provided facilitation support, for specific activities for the collaborative group. The liaison provided feedback to the community on its strategies, progress and challenges. The liaisons participated with the foundation in identifying community capacity-building needs and developing strategies and resources to meet those needs; once available, liaisons assisted each community group to identify specific needs for and make use of technical assistance at times and in ways that fit well with its interests and stage of collaborative development.

At the same time, the liaison approach presented its own challenges. These challenges included defining the liaison's relationship to the community and to the foundation as dual recipients of liaison services and setting boundaries on the liaison role, particularly with regard to foundation and community decision-making. Ensuring consistency and building shared practice across several liaisons with different experiences, skills, and knowledge base and managing changes in liaison responsibilities were challenges that inevitably arose in a large, multi-year initiative. The use of liaisons also required finding a way to balance being non-directive with acting on a commitment to helping communities succeed.

The use of liaisons in the Discovery Initiative represented a major investment on the part of the Memorial Fund in supporting the development of community collaborative groups and building their capacity to promote and guide community efforts on behalf of young children. Through the liaisons, community collaborative groups were provided with a resource that most would not have been able to find or utilize on their own: a long-term relationship with an individual consultant who brought an informed but objective perspective, who promoted a consistent set of values and goals while encouraging each community to identify and pursue its own course, and who connected community groups with information, tools, and peer connections at times and in ways that would be most helpful.

While this strategy itself presented challenges and required attention and resources, overall the use of community liaisons was an effective way to manage a large-scale community change. As such, the use of community liaisons is an approach that could have value in other community change initiatives. If so, the Discovery Initiative experience suggests that careful attention be paid to defining a role for liaisons that situates liaisons between the funder and the community, ensuring that the liaison role is clearly defined and communicated, selecting the right individuals for the position, and providing orientation and supervision as well as ongoing training and support.

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## I. INTRODUCTION

Funders – whether philanthropies, other non-profit organizations, or public entities – face a number of challenges in supporting community groups in making deep, meaningful, and sustained change for the well-being of individuals and families who live there. In addition, when more than a few communities are involved, coordination and management of the work becomes more complicated and requires more attention. There are special challenges when there is interest in building relationships among and sharing experiences and learning across communities. Funders have taken different approaches to meeting those challenges and supporting multiple communities, including working through intermediary organizations, employing consultants, and utilizing staff.

The Discovery Initiative, sponsored by the William Caspar Graustein Memorial Fund, provides the opportunity to examine how one approach – the use of community liaisons – has been implemented. It also allows the success of this approach in meeting the challenges of foundation-community partnership and in helping manage a multi-community initiative to be assessed. The observations and analysis presented in this paper are intended to summarize that experience<sup>1</sup> and draw out lessons learned that may be useful for other funders supporting community change initiatives.

This introductory chapter briefly describes the Discovery Initiative and its capacity building approach, which included the use of consultants serving as community liaisons. Drawing from the experiences of other community change efforts, this chapter also highlights the challenges in funder-community relationships encountered in other multi-community initiatives. These challenges will serve as the framework for assessing the role and value of community liaisons in the Discovery Initiative in the remainder of the paper.

### A. THE DISCOVERY INITIATIVE

#### 1. Initiative Goals and Strategies

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<sup>1</sup> Appendix B describes the data sources and methods used for this paper.

The Discovery Initiative, sponsored by the William Caspar Graustein Memorial Fund, is a multi-year effort to catalyze process, policy, and practice changes at the local and state levels in support of early childhood education in communities across Connecticut.<sup>2</sup> Beginning in 2002, the Initiative engaged 49 Connecticut communities<sup>3</sup> and a number of statewide and regional advocacy, research, and policy organizations in pursuing four specific objectives:

- Expand the supply of high quality early childhood education
- Increase the quality of existing early childhood education
- Build strong connections between early care and elementary education
- Improve students' social, emotional and academic performance

The Initiative also intended to support sustained community-level and statewide focus on early childhood issues and the capacity to continue to influence policy on behalf of young children.<sup>4</sup>

The Initiative focused on capacity building as its primary intervention strategy. Through grants, technical assistance, and other supports, the Initiative supported the development of collaborative groups in the Discovery communities. These collaborative groups were to manage and lead a change process that would support communities in analyzing, reflecting, organizing, and acting in support of young children. The Initiative was also expected to support the development of organizational capacities – such as staff skills and technology – of several state-wide and regional organizations involved in research, advocacy, and program innovation related to early care and education. These organizations were expected to build stronger relationships with each other and with communities and carry out collaborative projects. Similarly, the Memorial Fund intended to support related work of state entities in specific ways. These included participating in the Governor's Research and Policy Council that advised the Connecticut Early Childhood Education Cabinet and providing matching funds for the

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<sup>2</sup> For more information on the Discovery Initiative, see its website, [discovery.wcgmf.org](http://discovery.wcgmf.org). For information on the Memorial Fund, see [www.wcgmf.org](http://www.wcgmf.org).

<sup>3</sup> Five communities were added in 2008.

<sup>4</sup> The Discovery Initiative's theory of change, used in the Initiative evaluation, can be found at [discovery.wcgmf.org/toc.html](http://discovery.wcgmf.org/toc.html).

Parent Trust Fund and for the community planning grant program of the Department of Education.

Therefore, the Discovery Initiative's capacity-building approach was expected to promote:

- *Collaborative processes* at the community and state levels to bring diverse voices and perspectives, particularly those of *parents*, to decision-making, so that policies and programs would be well-designed and appropriately implemented;
- Dissemination and adoption of *early childhood practices* known to contribute to positive child outcomes; and
- Adoption of *policies* necessary to bring these practices to scale within a community and across the state.

Ultimately, the work in individual communities, regionally, across the state, and at the state level was expected to result in a dynamic interaction among the following factors:

- *A critical mass* of communities, advocates, and citizens, actively engaged in policy work at the local and state levels on early childhood issues;
- *Enhanced capacity* of community collaboratives and statewide organizations to work effectively on these issues;
- *Cumulative results* of specific changes in policy and practice related to the Discovery objectives; and
- *Political momentum* and a groundswell of public support.

## **2. Discovery Initiative Approach to Supporting Community Change**

The Memorial Fund implemented a strategy for supporting the Discovery Initiative communities that combined relatively small grants with an array of technical assistance resources focused on building collaboration, encouraging parent engagement, and promoting community change. One of the lessons learned in the Memorial Fund's earlier initiative (Children First) was that most communities had had little experience in developing broad-based collaborative groups, particularly groups engaging non-professionals and parents from diverse backgrounds. Further, it is often the case that communities beginning this type of work with foundation funding choose, or are directed, to create direct services or run programs. In these instances, the foundation grants may not strengthen community capacity to mobilize public support and develop sustainable plans to invest in young children. It often takes guidance and incentives from funders and others outside the community, and leadership, vision, and experience

from within the community for such groups to move from a focus on developing and implementing specific programs or activities toward a role as a catalyst for mobilizing community resources and actions to improve the early experiences of all the community's children.

The Discovery Initiative's technical assistance to communities focused on building their capacities to foster, lead, and manage a community change process on behalf of young children. The primary areas of capacity-building technical assistance<sup>5</sup> that the Memorial Fund sponsored<sup>6</sup> were:

- Collaborative building
- Community assessment
- Strategic planning
- Strategic communication strategies
- Community mobilization and organizing
- Advocacy and lobbying
- Parent engagement, involvement and leadership

Technical assistance included both knowledge dissemination and skill-building and for most of the Initiative (from 2002 through 2007) was developed and managed by a foundation program officer and a capacity-building consultant.<sup>7</sup> During this period most technical assistance was delivered through meetings or workshops at which communities were introduced to a topic and to available resources. These workshops were generally single-session events on a given topic, although topics were often repeated and elaborated upon during the course of the Initiative. Some technical

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<sup>5</sup> Some workshops and meetings provided information and resources on best practices in early childhood education, for example, related to kindergarten transition and informal care.

<sup>6</sup> Based on topics addressed in workshops, trainings, regional learning circles, and other capacity-building events on the Initiative calendar between 2002 and 2007. Beginning in 2008, technical assistance and training focused in three areas – facilitative leadership, community decision making, and results-based accountability – with workshop series offered by contracted organizations with specialized expertise.

<sup>7</sup> After that point, foundation staff – a community program officer and program associate – managed the capacity-building technical assistance, most of which was offered by contracted organizations.

assistance workshops were provided to the full group of Discovery communities together, while in other instances they were offered to smaller groups of communities organized by region or by level of collaborative structure and functioning identified at the beginning of the Initiative's implementation phase in 2004.<sup>8</sup> Materials from these sessions were made available on the Discovery website and communities could apply for related specialized on-site technical assistance from individual consultants. Communities were also provided peer learning opportunities through an annual conference, a listserv, and support for cross-site visits. These were in addition to the peer exchange opportunities that naturally occurred at workshops and meetings.

In addition to technical assistance workshops and materials, each community was assigned an individual consultant, called a community liaison. Each liaison was responsible for four to ten communities. The liaison acted as the information link between the Memorial Fund and the Discovery community and across communities by collecting and sharing lessons learned. The liaison was also a resource, and in some circumstances provided facilitation support, for specific activities of the collaborative group. The liaison provided feedback to the community on its strategies, progress and challenges. The liaisons participated with the foundation in identifying community capacity-building needs and developing strategies and resources to meet those needs; once available, liaisons assisted each community group in identifying specific needs for and making use of technical assistance at times and in ways that fit well with its interests and stage of collaborative development.

## **B. CHALLENGES IN FUNDER-COMMUNITY RELATIONSHIPS IN COMMUNITY CHANGE INITIATIVES**

The authors of "Toward Greater Effectiveness in Community Change"<sup>9</sup> summarized the underlying issue in the foundation-community relationship in the following way: "The complexity of funders' relationships with grantees is almost a truism, but community-change investments seem to pose a particularly acute relationship challenge, given the often higher level of interaction between funders and grantees in community initiatives."

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<sup>8</sup> The 2004 level of collaborative structure and functioning was based on the judgment of the foundation program staff and capacity-building consultant, using information provided by the community liaisons and included in community applications.

<sup>9</sup> Brown, Hamilton, and Richman, 2003, pages 25-26.

Because of this, supporting community change initiatives is not an approach that fits well with every funder's capacities, philosophy, and management style.<sup>10</sup>

Four aspects of funder-sponsored community change initiatives can present potential challenges that may affect success – managing the work, bridging power differences between funders and communities, balancing consistency with responsiveness, and supporting community capacity building. Each of these has played out in distinct ways in the Discovery Initiative and for each, the use of community liaisons has contributed to addressing these challenges as well as raising some of its own. The remainder of this chapter briefly elaborates on these challenges.

## **1. Management of a Community Change Initiative**

Managing the work of a community change initiative is especially challenging when a number of communities and diverse stakeholders are involved. In addition to the time demands associated with administering multiple grants, building solid relationships and ensuring timely and consistent communication are also difficult. The quality of funder-community relationships and of the communication between funders and communities are both important to the success of community change initiatives.

The Memorial Fund's first community change initiative was Children First, which was implemented in seven Connecticut communities between 1994 and 2001. In Children First, it was foundation staff and a consultant who coordinated the provision of capacity building technical assistance and carried out the initiative management tasks. With the expansion to forty-nine communities in the Discovery Initiative, the Memorial Fund soon realized that simply communicating with each of these communities could not be accomplished by staff at the desired frequency, much less staying up-to-date on the work in each community and providing individual feedback. At this point, the foundation decided to work with a team of consultants, each one of whom was assigned to work with a set of communities as their liaison, to supplement staff's interaction with communities.<sup>11</sup>

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<sup>10</sup> See Brown and Fiester, 2007.

<sup>11</sup> The Memorial Fund staff continued to work directly with the community collaborative groups in several ways, including holding both on- and off-site conversations with group members and community leaders, attending and presenting at community meetings, and making periodic site visits to each community. The

## 2. Power and Resource Differences between Funders and Communities

Funders by their nature have control over resources that communities want and need. Compared to community groups with which they hope to partner, funders also generally have greater access to information and expertise, more internal resources – including staff and technology, and more connections with policymakers and other individuals whose actions affect communities. These differences in power and resources between funders and community groups can affect relationships and communication. They can create dynamics that undermine the long-term success of community change initiatives, particularly when community groups feel that they must follow funder directives, whether implicit or explicit, even when other strategies or goals would be more appropriate to the community's needs, would enjoy greater community support, or would have greater likelihood of being sustained.

The Memorial Fund has worked hard to exemplify a partnership approach in its work with communities. Some of the ways in which the Memorial Fund's approach has been described by grantees<sup>12</sup> includes:

- Engaging in respectful listening and responding to what is heard
- Being consistent in focus (early childhood) and underlying principles (parent and community engagement and collaboration) and transparent in its messages

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foundation staff had sole responsibility for decisions about community grants as well as oversight over grants and consulting arrangements with other organizations and individuals involved in the Initiative. This has similarities to the hybrid approach taken by the Skillman Foundation in its Detroit Works for Kids Initiative, in which foundation staff retained control over the design and implementation of the initiative overall, while contracting with intermediary organizations to work intensively in each neighborhood (see Brown, Colombo, and Hughes, 2009). This allowed the foundation to remain “embedded” in the work without adding to staff. The Memorial Fund's approach to its work in communities shares many characteristics with other “embedded” funders in its long-term commitment to the communities it supports and the value it places on relationships, both between the foundation and its grantee communities and within the communities themselves (see Brown et al., 2007).

<sup>12</sup> Discovery Initiative 2004-2007: Interim Summative Report, S. A. Stephens and D. Studdiford, 2008, at [http://discovery.wcgmf.org/resources/sps\\_resource\\_1224.pdf](http://discovery.wcgmf.org/resources/sps_resource_1224.pdf). As noted in footnote 9, these are characteristics shared by the Memorial Fund with other “embedded” funders. How they have been exemplified in practice is illustrated in Leiderman and Studdiford, 2009.

- Being willing to modify strategies, reflecting learning and changing conditions
- Fostering relationships and establishing personal connections

These characteristics are seen by grantees and outside observers as hallmarks of the Memorial Fund's approach and have contributed to trust and honesty in foundation-community relationships in the Discovery Initiative.

### **3. Consistency and Responsiveness**

Initiatives that support community change, especially in multiple sites, are messy in that the trajectory in each site is highly dependent on the history, personalities, political dynamics, internal capacities and resources, and other factors specific to each community. This aspect of community change initiatives makes it difficult to maintain a common timeline, standard benchmarks for progress, and a predetermined set of supports. There is also the challenge of maintaining the initiative's coherence while responding to diverse and emerging needs and conditions.

As noted earlier, the Memorial Fund's approach to working with all its grantees has been one of listening, learning, and responding to experience and lessons. The community liaisons have played an important role in the foundation's ability to carry out this approach with the large number of communities in the Discovery Initiative. They have also been an instrument for focusing the community groups on the core vision and principles guiding the Initiative. At the same time, using several consultants who work on a continuing but part-time basis with a subset of the communities has itself posed some challenges in maintaining consistency in the Initiative.

### **4. Capacity Building Supports for Communities**

Community change initiatives generally take a capacity-building approach, based on the assumption that broad-based long-term change requires that community groups and their members become equipped with the knowledge and skills to lead and sustain change strategies. Initiatives that engage more than a few communities face challenges in providing capacity-building information and technical assistance in ways that are efficient while meeting specific community needs at the right time.

As noted above, the primary strategy used by the Memorial Fund in its work with communities in the Discovery Initiative was one of capacity-building. Rather than funding programs or direct service projects, a technical assistance strategy was designed to support the development of community groups that embodied the core principles of collaboration, parent leadership, and community engagement and that could lead a community change process. Community liaisons were an integral part of the Initiative's capacity-building strategy.

This report attempts to capture the perspectives, experiences, and learnings about the role and contributions of community liaisons in the Discovery Initiative, based primarily on reflections by community members and the liaisons themselves, with review and input from Memorial Fund staff. Chapter II describes the roles and responsibilities of the community liaisons in the Discovery Initiative in more detail. Chapter III reports the contributions made by the liaisons to the work in communities. In the subsequent chapters, how the use of community liaisons addressed each of the challenges in community change initiatives is explored. The final chapter summarizes lessons learned and draws out potential implications for other foundation-supported community change initiatives.

## II. COMMUNITY LIAISONS IN THE DISCOVERY INITIATIVE

In 2002 a description of the role of Community Liaison Consultant was developed for the Discovery Initiative. It outlined the desired experience, training, and skills of individuals working as liaisons, as well as their duties and responsibilities.<sup>13</sup> Over the course of the Initiative through 2009, a number of individuals served as community liaisons, bringing their own individual skills and experiences. As the Initiative matured and the work in communities progressed, some changes in specific liaison responsibilities were made. At the same time, ways in which the Memorial Fund supported the work of liaisons also changed.

This chapter describes the roles and responsibilities of community liaisons as defined by the Memorial Fund and the range of activities in which they were engaged. This chapter also describes the qualifications and experiences of the individuals serving as liaisons and the supports provided to the liaisons to aid them in their work. The time frame for this description is from 2002 through mid-2009, using data gathered in the Discovery Initiative evaluation.

### A. COMMUNITY LIAISON ROLES AND RESPONSIBILITIES

As a critical capacity building tool for the Initiative, the liaison role has a clear purpose – to “bias” or “incline” the community work to success. To achieve this purpose, the liaison role has, from the beginning of the Initiative, been multi-faceted, in its relationship with communities and with the Memorial Fund. Various terms have been used by Memorial Fund staff and the liaisons themselves to describe that role with communities, including “critical friend,” “sounding board,” “coach,” “keeping focus on the big picture,” “holding up the mirror,” and “cheerleader.” Essential to this side of the liaison role is posing questions that encourage deeper reflection and analysis as the community groups form, deliberate, and come to decisions.<sup>14</sup>

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<sup>13</sup> See Appendix A. A memorandum of agreement outlining the specific scope of services and a list of “Do’s and Don’ts” for the liaisons were also developed in 2002.

<sup>14</sup> Liaison perspectives on their role with communities are further explored in Frusciante, 2009, and in unpublished notes from the Fall 2009 liaison retreat.

With respect to their relationship with the Memorial Fund, liaisons are seen by themselves and by the communities as the “eyes, ears, and voice” for, but not of, the Memorial Fund. That is, the liaisons are understood to provide the foundation with real-time, on-the-ground perspectives on work in the communities and to communicate information about the Initiative in both directions between the communities and the foundation. But throughout the Initiative the fact that the liaisons are not empowered to make decisions on behalf of the foundation, nor were they allowed to make decisions on behalf of the communities, has been established as a clear boundary to the liaison role.

During the course of the Initiative, as relationships were developed, learning occurred and opportunities and challenges arose, the activities carried out by the community liaisons changed in response. However, their basic role as a key capacity-building resource to support community success has not changed, nor has their position “in the middle” between community and funder.

## 1. At the Beginning of the Initiative

The community liaison’s essential duties, as outlined by the Memorial Fund in 2002, were in the following eight areas:<sup>15</sup>

- **Information Management.** Maintain a current profile on each assigned community. The profile will include information on community characteristics, demographics, local culture, and overall status of children.
- **Relationships.** Function as the information link between the foundation and the Discovery communities.

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<sup>15</sup> Position Description, Working Draft, January 17, 2002. Certain duty areas were spelled out in more detail, specifically relationship management and capacity building, as shown in Appendix A. Later position descriptions – for example, the 2006 description that was included in the binder of materials provided to communities at the May 2007 application information session – organized these duty areas into four categories: relationship management, capacity building, knowledge development, and public will building.

- **Documentation.** Responsible for the documentation of the work within community and reporting on such activities to the foundation.
- **Capacity Building.** As a member of the program management team, participate in the development of an initiative-wide capacity building approach for the Discovery communities.
- **Knowledge Development.** Contribute to knowledge development at the Memorial Fund and in the field by regular and systematic collection of lessons learned throughout implementation of Discovery.
- **Public Will.** Be a resource and facilitator of actions, research, and activities that assist community in building an informed constituency for children.
- **Resource Allocation.** Assist the program management team and Executive Director in developing recommendations for future resource allocation plans.
- **Community Connections.** Be a critical link between and within communities participating in Discovery.

In 2002, the scope of work for the community liaisons included the following activities:

- Conduct visits to each assigned community, with the frequency to be based on community need, technical assistance strategy, and resource availability.
- Maintain monthly contact by telephone with local representatives to discuss community progress and provide updates on the Initiative.
- Participate in conference calls and meetings with the Memorial Fund's program officer, the capacity building broker, and other foundation staff to coordinate activities.
- Attend liaison skill enhancement sessions organized by the Memorial Fund.
- Attend capacity building seminars and activities offered to communities.
- Submit reports on community progress.
- Participate in the development of other Initiative strategies, including public will and knowledge development.

## 2. Liaison Activities over the Course of the Initiative

From the beginning of the Initiative, community liaisons were to attend meetings of the community collaborative groups, communicate with the coordinator and other collaborative leaders, answer questions or provide information about the Initiative, and ask questions to help the community groups consider alternatives to, anticipate the consequences of, and assess the results of their actions and decisions.<sup>16</sup> The liaisons and the Memorial Fund considered this last function as a particularly valuable aspect of the liaison's role – to be a “critical friend” and “hold up the mirror” so that the collaborative groups could be more reflective and intentional in their work.

At points throughout the Initiative there were revisions to the liaison job description and additions to liaison activities. These are described here and presented in chart form in Appendix B.

In 2006 the liaison job description was streamlined to focus on four core areas – relationship management (specifically serving as an information link between the Memorial Fund and the Discovery communities), capacity building (participating in both the development and implementation of initiative-wide activities and resources), knowledge development (collecting and sharing lessons learned), and public will building (assisting communities in building an informed constituency for young children). That job description added two activities to the liaison repertoire: facilitating community planning and assessment, and providing feedback to the community on progress and challenges. In 2006, communities were told that the community liaisons could facilitate the annual assessment and planning sessions, and in 2007 liaisons were expected to perform that function in all communities. Community liaisons also began facilitating regional learning circles on specific topics with participants from several communities in 2006.

Throughout the Initiative, community liaisons were asked to review and comment on community grant renewal applications and provide ratings of progress for each community to which they were assigned. These ratings were used as one source of information on communities during foundation staff reviews of annual community grant renewal applications. The liaisons did not participate in staff deliberations or decisions.

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<sup>16</sup> Community groups were not required to invite their liaison to meetings or to engage with the liaison in any particular way. However, liaisons were expected to continue to contact and offer their assistance regardless of community response.

In 2007, the liaisons began participating in a lengthy process to design a more rigorous rating tool for assessing community progress and used this tool in their annual community reviews in 2008 and 2009. In 2009 liaisons pilot tested this tool with several communities for their use in the annual self-assessment and planning process.

Also, throughout the course of the Initiative, the liaisons were asked to provide information on community technical assistance needs, comment on the capacity-building event schedule and topics, and on occasion participate in the development of capacity-building resources, including a strategic communications toolkit and a community guide to build opportunities for parent engagement and leadership. In 2009 the liaisons were trained in both results-based accountability and community decision making by the contracted technical assistance providers. The liaisons also co-designed and led regional seminars on the community decision making framework.

Expectations for the amount of contact between liaisons and community representatives varied to some degree over the course of the Initiative. Each liaison was assigned between 5 and 10 communities and in general these assignments remained stable during the individual's tenure as liaison. In 2002, liaisons were instructed to allocate an average of two hours per week to each assigned community, not to exceed eight hours total with a given community in any given month. In 2006, the average expected hours per week of contact with communities was increased to five and in 2007 the budgeted liaison time per community was 5.8 hours per month. In 2008, liaisons were instructed to spend an average of up to 7.5 hours per month per community, with a minimum of two hours and a maximum of ten hours.

An internal foundation analysis of liaison time directly in contact with communities over a period of four months in 2007 showed that approximately 80 percent of their time was spent on-site, with another 16 percent in telephone and/or e-mail communication and 4 percent providing feedback on community documents and materials. On average, communities received 10.6 contacts for 5.6 hours of liaison time. During that same time period, taking all liaison hours into account, 70 percent of their time was spent in work with their assigned communities, 9 percent attending technical assistance sessions and other convenings, and 21 percent in other work, including participation in monthly liaison meetings, preparation of review documents for the Memorial Fund, and individual consultation with foundation staff.

## **B. LIAISON CHARACTERISTICS AND BACKGROUND**

The 2002 job description listed the following areas of working knowledge that individuals serving as community liaisons were expected to possess:

- The grants process in a foundation setting
- The Connecticut context
- The status of children in Connecticut
- Child and family serving institutions and systems, particularly the early care and education system
- Processes for identifying community assets and working within a strength-based frame
- Evaluation processes and dynamics
- Effective use of technical assistance
- Dynamics of working with parents and grassroots communities

During the Initiative, there were generally six consultants serving as liaisons at any given time, each working with between four and ten communities, with these assignments generally constant.<sup>17</sup> The group of individuals working on the Initiative in 2009 had been community liaisons for periods ranging from one to seven years, with the majority beginning in early 2004. This group was generally representative of those serving in that capacity throughout the course of the Initiative and their backgrounds illustrate the depth of knowledge and skills the liaisons brought to the Discovery Initiative.

- All but one held master's degrees, in fields such as business administration, social work, or public health.

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<sup>17</sup> While there were a number of consultants who served as liaisons only during the planning phase of the Discovery Initiative (2002-2003), beginning with the implementation phase in 2004, there was little turnover in the individuals serving as liaisons. Between 2004 and 2009, two liaisons left (one in 2004 and the other in 2008) and one additional consultant was hired.

- All had been executive director or administrator in social service or education agencies, and two of the six were also Discovery community coordinators prior to becoming a liaison.
- All had provided consulting services to other clients, including mediation, strategic planning, executive coaching, and community building technical assistance.

All point to these experiences as important in preparing them to be effective as community liaisons. What was deemed especially important were skills in working with groups, as illustrated by these liaison comments on what in their backgrounds and experience contributed to their value:

- “My training and practice as a mediator – finding common ground, asking questions, not taking sides.”
- “My background in clinical social work – I’m able to engage with different personalities and handle various group dynamics.”
- “My understanding of process design – I know what kinds of process will be helpful in getting the group to its goals.”
- “My training and skills as a moderator.”

When Memorial Fund staff responsible for supervising the work of the community liaisons were asked in 2008 what qualifications they would recommend for this position, they focused on practical knowledge and real-world experience:

- Strong interpersonal skills, able to listen and provide clear constructive feedback, be flexible, have a non-threatening communication style, be thoughtful and respectful
- Knowledge of the political context and understanding of political processes
- Understanding and commitment to the value of collaboration and the importance of inclusion of those affected by community decisions
- Training and professional experience in group process facilitation

- Direct experience with leading or participating in community level collaboratives
- Experience in job and group process coaching
- Experience working with grassroots and cultural/ethnic groups
- Able to work well with both formal & informal community leaders
- Knowledge of social network theory
- Experience working with or for not-for-profit/community-based organizations
- References from communities about success working in and with community collaborative/partnership processes

These skills and experiences go hand-in-hand with personal traits that the liaison have found helpful in their work, including a calm personality, being able to step outside of oneself and see things through others' eyes, and ability to tolerate ambiguity and to allow others to take the lead. The last trait was considered especially important in being able to maintain an objective but involved stance, as described by one liaison: "You have to have patience and understanding to let the community work it out for itself, but still think ahead and visualize options so people can go on. That part of my role is like parenting – loving them, letting them make their own decisions, and preparing to help them."

What was also considered valuable was a sense of passion for the work and a strong desire to "incline the communities to success, a phrase used by several liaisons. One liaison likened this to a song in which "...the music is as important as the words. You need to bring a sense of enthusiasm and be encouraging and supportive."

What the liaisons found particularly rewarding in their work was also an important part of what they brought to the work – what kept them going when progress seemed slow or when their relationship with a community was rocky. Four areas were consistently mentioned by the liaisons as those in which they found the greatest satisfaction:

- The value of the work itself -- "This is important work – it is good to be doing something that has broader and deeper value."

- Pride in the integrity of the foundation – “Representing the Memorial Fund because...they really mean it that they are in a partnership with communities – representing the Memorial Fund is an honor.”
- Progress in the communities – “When the light bulb goes off – seeing folks acknowledge their own accomplishments and feel that what they are doing is important.”
- Variety in the work – “What I do in each community is different because of the different personalities and different stages of development.”

### **C. SUPPORTING THE WORK OF THE LIAISONS**

The Memorial Fund provided supervision and support for the community liaisons throughout the Initiative in two primary ways – through individual and group meetings with Memorial Fund staff and through participation in seminars and workshops in the technical assistance areas offered to communities.

Throughout the Initiative, the Memorial Fund organized monthly liaison meetings, usually lasting four to six hours, with Memorial Fund staff. Over time, the liaisons were given responsibility, with Memorial Fund staff, for developing the agenda for the monthly meetings and for facilitating and documenting the meetings. These meetings served several purposes. They provided an opportunity for the Memorial Fund staff to share information on their thinking and where they were headed as the Initiative unfolded. During the meetings the liaisons were provided with updates on other activities of the Initiative, particularly the capacity-building technical assistance and the work at the state policy level.

The meetings were also times when the liaisons could connect with peers wrestling with the same challenges and serve as coaches and mentors to each other. This process was formalized in 2008, when specific time was set aside in each meeting for peer review and consultation on specific situations for which a liaison wanted input and feedback from the others and from foundation staff.<sup>18</sup> Also in 2008, the statewide organizations working on advocacy and mobilization began attending the liaison

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<sup>18</sup> In 2008 a listserv was set up to allow liaisons and foundation staff to share thoughts, questions, or ideas between meetings, but to date it has not been used on a regular basis.

meetings on a quarterly basis to share information and suggestions for work with the communities.

In addition to monthly meetings, a retreat for liaisons and Memorial Fund staff was held annually. The retreats provided time for more in-depth exploration of issues and discussion of plans for the upcoming year.<sup>19</sup>

One liaison noted that attending the technical assistance workshops and seminars offered to communities, while a requirement of their job, was also “free professional development on the job,” something most consultants do not receive from their clients. Training in results-based accountability and community decision making was especially valued, as these were designed to give liaisons the knowledge and experience to use specific tools and techniques in these areas with communities. During 2008 staff from the technical assistance organization providing training on community decision making participated in liaison meetings via conference call. This exchange was intended to give the technical assistance provider greater grounding in the work going on in the Discovery communities and an opportunity to be a resource for the liaisons in supporting community work.

At their 2009 retreat, the liaisons identified other areas of knowledge and skills that most would like to develop or strengthen, including conflict resolution, budget analysis, data collection and analysis, and more in-depth understanding of the technical assistance on results-based accountability, community decision-making, and facilitative leadership being offered at that point to communities. These were the areas of work that the Memorial Fund expected the liaisons to have expertise, given its focus on process and community building. At the same time, during interviews with the liaisons, the biggest gap they reported in their own background and experience was in the area of early care and education systems. As one liaison pointed out: “I don’t know if anyone of us is really steeped in early childhood – I mean regulations and standards, not general early childhood theory and research – so we could understand the conditions and challenges that the providers and communities are working under.”

The liaisons valued the way in which the Memorial Fund staff related to them with respect and support.

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<sup>19</sup> In 2007 the liaison retreat focused on developing an initial set of “indicators of success” for community collaborative groups, and in 2009 the retreat delved into the liaison role and possible options for future work with communities.

- “We are really listened to by the Memorial Fund; they really take our point of view and opinions into account in the Initiative. It would be easy to feel like the ‘low man on the totem pole,’ but it goes along with the value that the Memorial Fund places on communities that we are seen as key.”
- “[The Memorial Fund staff] try to meet our needs, paying attention to what would make this better – that is in and of itself a support. They don’t take us for granted; they know they need to pay attention to us to get value from what we do.”

Liaisons met individually with the Memorial Fund’s program officer to review their work, several times a year. Even so several liaisons indicated that more feedback from Memorial Fund staff would be welcomed. In addition, some liaisons wanted more direct feedback on their work from communities. There was no routine or systematic mechanism provided in the Initiative for communities to assess or comment on their liaison’s performance, although the Memorial Fund staff were accessible and responsive when concerns or problems were brought to their attention.

The community liaison role in the Discovery Initiative was an essential component of the Memorial Fund’s strategy to promote community change on behalf of young children. It was a complex role, positioned between the foundation itself and the community groups formed to implement the Initiative in 49 localities across the state of Connecticut.<sup>20</sup> The community liaisons contributed to progress in the Discovery Initiative communities, as documented in the next chapter. They also contributed to how the foundation addressed a number of challenges in the Discovery Initiative. These contributions are examined in Chapters III-VI.

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<sup>20</sup> In 2008, 5 additional communities joined the Initiative and were assigned a liaison to support their work.

**III. CONTRIBUTIONS OF LIAISONS TO WORK IN THE DISCOVERY COMMUNITIES**

In the Discovery Initiative, the liaisons were to provide support to help the collaborative groups develop the capacities needed to lead community change on behalf of young children. This component of the Initiative was very resource- and labor-intensive on the part of the Memorial Fund.

As shown in Tables 1 and 2 below, the annual cost, 2003 through 2008, for the liaisons averaged approximately \$220,000 or about 60 percent of the funds expended for all capacity building activities, which also included, in addition to the liaisons, convenings of communities such as the annual Stone Soup conference, communications support through the community listserv and Discovery website, and expenses for capacity-building workshops and technical assistance consultants. Working with the liaisons also absorbed substantial staff time in monthly meetings, individual consultations, and administrative oversight.<sup>21</sup>

**Table 1: Allocation of Memorial Fund Expenditures by Category, 2003 through 2008**

<b>Grant Year</b>	<b>Capacity Building and Communications</b>	<b>Liaisons</b>	<b>Initiative Budget</b>	<b>Convening</b>
2003	\$232,000	\$143,000	\$1,947,000	\$24,000
2004	\$137,000	\$156,000	\$2,403,000	\$31,000
2005	\$205,000	\$213,000	\$3,974,000	\$32,000
2006	\$473,000	\$221,000	\$2,363,000	\$32,000
2007	\$717,000	\$290,000	\$4,347,000	\$140,000
2008	\$704,000	\$293,000	\$4,296,000	\$113,000
Annual Average	\$411,000	\$219,000	\$3,222,000	\$62,000

<sup>21</sup> Data provided by the Memorial Fund.

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Note: Amounts rounded to nearest \$1,000.

**Table 2: Memorial Fund Expenditures for Community Liaisons  
as Percent of Various Budget Categories, 2003 through 2008**

<b>Grant Year</b>	<b>Liaisons as % of Capacity Building, Communication, &amp; Convening</b>	<b>Liaisons, Capacity Building, Communications, &amp; Convening as % of Total Budget</b>	<b>Liaisons as % of Total Initiative Budget including Grants</b>
2003	56%	17%	6%
2004	93%	12%	6%
2005	90%	10%	5%
2006	44%	24%	8%
2007	34%	21%	6%
2008	36%	21%	6%
Annual Average	59%	17%	6%

The value of the liaisons to community progress was evident. When asked to assess the value of the liaisons to their work, community collaborative coordinators and members virtually universally described them as the most valuable type of support provided by the Memorial Fund.

The liaisons believed that they made a difference in how communities responded to the Discovery Initiative as an opportunity. As one stated, “communities would have dealt with the Initiative as a grant or project.” This viewpoint was echoed by the collaborative group member who said, “Every year our liaison helps us get more connected to the overall vision for the Discovery work...When we started we were very provider focused and we have gotten closer and closer to the big picture.” As these examples highlight, the liaisons appeared to be particularly valuable in conveying to all communities the systemic nature of the changes that were the intended goals of the Initiative.

During 2007 information was gathered from Discovery community collaborative groups about how they worked with their community liaison and ways in which the liaison contributed to their progress.<sup>22</sup> This information is summarized in this chapter.

## **A. LIAISON ACTIVITIES IN COMMUNITIES**

One coordinator summarized the full range of liaison work: “Our liaison is a good sounding board for our work. Our liaison does a lot of cross-pollinating – sharing ideas between communities. Our liaison has been a really good connection to the Memorial Fund. Our liaison is there to answer questions about anything that is going on. Gives us a great update at each monthly meeting and makes sure we understand the technical assistance offerings. Our liaison is facilitating our community strategic planning process.”

The work of the liaisons was understood by communities to involve supporting communication from the Memorial Fund to the community and vice versa. Communities expected the liaisons would convey the foundation’s vision and values (reported by 73 percent of the community coordinators and members interviewed) and clarify foundation communications (67 percent). The liaisons were also expected to be a vehicle for communicating community experiences to foundation staff. According to collaborative group staff and members interviewed in 2007, liaisons were to:

- Be the “voice from the front line” (mentioned by 62 percent of communities)
- Report on community progress (40 percent of communities)
- Represent the community’s experience and factors affecting their work (27 percent)
- Use their knowledge of communities to help the foundation frame their capacity-building activities (16 percent).

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<sup>22</sup> The grant renewal application, submitted in February 2007, contained a form for reporting whether the liaison assigned to each community conducted specific activities and how valuable – very, some, a little, or not at all – each type of activity was to community progress during 2006. In mid-2007 the Discovery evaluation team interviewed the community coordinator, sometimes accompanied by the chair or other collaborative group members, in each community by telephone. This interview included open-ended questions about how the liaison role was understood and whether and how the liaison had supported or contributed to the work in the community.

In addition to playing a key role in foundation-community communication, many collaborative group staff and members reported that their liaison acted as group facilitator during processes required by the Memorial Fund, specifically the annual self-assessment and action plans.<sup>23</sup> Also frequently mentioned was support for the coordinator,<sup>24</sup> including orienting new coordinators to the Initiative, advising coordinators (and sometimes collaborative chairs) on meeting logistics and agendas, being a sounding board for the coordinators' ideas, and answering their questions.

Liaisons were also a major vehicle for communities to make connections with each other and learn about each other's experiences. About two in five coordinators noted that their liaison had shared information about another community and the same number reported that the liaison had facilitated a peer sharing opportunity or event.

According to the liaisons, in 2006 they provided some type of technical assistance in almost one-third of the communities on topics such as strategic planning, parent engagement and use of the Parent Voice and Action Guide, strategic communications, and kindergarten transition planning.

## **B. CONTRIBUTIONS OF THE LIAISONS**

Overall, the community coordinators and others commenting on the work of the liaisons gave very positive assessments of their value and contributions. Over 90 percent of the community applications submitted in 2007 described each type of liaison activity – facilitating meetings, advising the coordinator or chair, and providing feedback to the group – as very or somewhat valuable, with most responses (over 70 percent) being “very valuable.” Very few communities indicated that any of these liaison activities were only a little or not at all valuable.

During the 2007 interviews, about one-third of the coordinators and collaborative members interviewed described a specific way in which the liaison made a difference in how the collaborative group was structured or functioned. Some examples of ways in

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<sup>23</sup> Mentioned in 44 percent of the interviews with community coordinators.

<sup>24</sup> Mentioned in 58 percent of the interviews with community coordinators..

which the liaison contributed to the collaborative processes and groups were described by the community coordinators:

- “When we need it, our liaison has been a terrific observer of group processes and suggests ways to look at how we work as a group.”
- “It was recommended that we go through the communications toolkit. Our liaison facilitated several meetings in that process and I found her to be very good at leading us through.”
- “Our liaison really helped us write a mission statement – helped us define what we really wanted to have in it.”
- “If we are thinking about doing something, our liaison talks about technical assistance and other supports that might be available.”

However, often specific examples did not come readily to mind, reflecting as one liaison noted, “It’s more an accumulation of smaller positive things than a specific incident.” The long-term relationship and deep knowledge developed during that relationship were often cited as a major factor in the value of the liaisons, rather than any single action. As one coordinator reported, “Our liaison has been really important to our community, particularly early on. She came in early on when we really needed her and now she is here for suggestions and ideas. Our liaison has been around long enough that she really knows and understands us. Our community liaison is the number one most valuable support from the Memorial Fund for us.”

The liaisons were also an important resource for the foundation staff. In addition to keeping staff up-to-date on activities and issues in communities, liaisons provided valuable perspectives on how the foundation’s plans or communications might be understood, or misunderstood, in communities. Staff recognized that this helped ensure that the messages they wanted to convey were clear and made sense. Beyond feedback on communication, the liaison’s in-depth knowledge helped the foundation avoid pitfalls or landmines in their relationships with community members and groups. As the program officer acknowledged, “Knowing our values and our goal of working in partnership with communities, the liaisons knew what would push buttons or be

misunderstood by communities. In that way, the liaisons helped us live out our values, be supportive for real, be true to our intent to build relationships with communities.”

## **C. CHALLENGES**

There are two challenges that the liaisons faced in working with communities in the Discovery Initiative, both of which would be applicable in other situations as well.

### **1. Maintaining a Non-Directive Stance**

Collaborative group staff and members were clear about the boundaries of the liaison role and knew what their liaison could not be expected to do. Activities outside the bounds of the liaison role were anything that involved making decisions on behalf of the community, telling the community what to do, or preparing the grant proposal. At the same time, the line between advising and directing was sometimes in the eye of the beholder.<sup>25</sup>

The liaison role, as described by one of them, was designed to “incline communities toward success” and the individuals who served in that role were committed to helping communities succeed. However, in this as in other community change initiatives, not all communities and collaborative groups made progress equally -- some appeared to make no progress, and some experienced periods of stagnation or even decline. The Discovery Initiative liaisons noted that this reality created tension in maintaining their non-directive support role. As one liaison commented, “When communities don’t make progress, it’s frustrating. Getting a balance with communities is challenging – how much do I come in and be a little more directive when I think they are going in the wrong direction?”

The liaisons were to be intentional in guiding communities toward the capacities needed to support long-term change, while at the same time being aware of and not crossing a

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<sup>25</sup> This challenge, of not focusing the group’s attention in a particular way because of one’s own beliefs or assumptions, is described in Briggs, 2003.

line that was, by the nature of the work, fuzzy at best. It was easy to err on both sides, as the following comments illustrate:

- “I have become the ‘enemy’ because I keep raising questions about their work.” (Liaison)
- “The chair wanted to create a local commission and I became the ‘bad guy’ by raising questions like, ‘when will the collaborative hear about and decide on this?’” (Liaison)
- “I want our liaison to look more carefully ahead of time and give us feedback ahead of time rather than a post hoc critique.” (Coordinator)
- “I have the feeling that the Memorial Fund has indicated to the liaisons that they shouldn’t get overly involved in steering, but I feel there are occasions when our liaison could share more about what we could do next.” (Coordinator)

At the same time, in most situations coordinators and collaborative group members believed that the liaisons handled the balance well. As one coordinator summarized, “Our liaison brings up things – ‘you may want to think of this’. It’s not really giving advice and not saying ‘why don’t you do this?’.”

## **2. Community Factors Limiting Liaison Effectiveness**

Understanding the contributions of liaisons as a capacity-building resource has to take account of community characteristics and dynamics that affect how much the local collaborative group will engage with and make use of its assigned liaison. At the same time, the liaison was intended to be a resource that could be tailored to fit the needs and circumstances of a diverse set of communities at different points in the development of collaborative and community capacities.

The liaisons in the Discovery Initiative were very aware of the importance of community context and history in what they did and how valuable their actions were to the community. They noted several factors that contributed to their effectiveness or lack of it: the length of the liaison's relationship with and depth of knowledge about the community, the quality of the liaison-coordinator relationship, and the internal resources and dynamics of the group. Comments from the liaisons and community members illustrate how these factors affected the intensity and quality of the work in communities:

- “In 2008 I got two new communities – it’s taken time for that relationship to evolve. So I see how much more I am utilized in the other communities where I’ve worked longer.” (Liaison)
- “It’s very difficult to feel effective in new communities with very small grants and few hours of coordinator staff time.” (Liaison)
- “I’ve heard the Memorial Fund say that every community is unique – sometimes I think this is where our liaison is falling short – not knowing our community well enough to apply the Discovery message and approach specifically to us.” (Coordinator)
- “This community is not good at using me as a liaison, partly because of the way I started with the group. The coordinator had been working with the collaborative group for a long time while I was new to the work and to early childhood issues. The group doesn’t use me – they don’t feel an openness to my involvement from the coordinator.” (Liaison)
- “Our current liaison is a good personality for this community. We have had others come in over time who just came on too strong and matter of fact. Our current liaison is very respectful of people’s voices.” (Coordinator)
- “This community is very discouraging. They were doing so well and had so many people engaged, but then the coordinator moved and the new coordinator didn’t have the connections. Now there are only three people with no energy or momentum. I keep trying to nudge them, but there’s no uptake at all.” (Liaison)

The opportunities provided to liaisons to discuss these challenges and strategize about possible responses with their peers were greatly valued. The liaisons also appreciated the acknowledgement by the Memorial Fund that communities differed in their interest and capacity to use liaisons as a resource. Even so, as described above, these issues remained a source of frustration and, in some cases, self-doubt among the Discovery Initiative liaisons.

## **IV. CHALLENGES IN MANAGING THE WORK OF A COMMUNITY CHANGE INITIATIVE**

This chapter focuses on the challenges faced by foundations in managing multi-community change initiatives and how the use of community liaisons in the Discovery Initiative addressed these challenges. There are also management issues associated with the use of community liaisons; these, and the approach used by the Memorial Fund to address these issues, are also described here.

Once an initiative is designed and sites selected, management tasks in multi-community initiatives include communicating consistently, monitoring performance, providing technical assistance, and promoting cross-site learning including evaluation.<sup>26</sup> Foundations generally take one or more of the following approaches:

- Use foundation staff to carry out management tasks
- Contract with consultants and support organizations to handle specific management tasks
- Transfer management responsibilities to an intermediary organization

The Memorial Fund took a hybrid approach in the Discovery Initiative that divided management tasks among the foundation staff, a consultant serving as capacity-building broker (from 2002 through 2007), and the community liaisons. The liaisons played a part, to a greater or lesser extent, in the management tasks as described below. They had a major role in communication and cross-community learning, a supportive role in performance tracking, and an increasing role in providing technical assistance.

### **A. USING LIAISONS IN INITIATIVE MANAGEMENT**

#### **1. Communication**

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<sup>26</sup> These management tasks are outlined in Brown, 2005.

Communication about grant-related matters was initiated by the foundation, although liaisons were available to help clarify these communications if necessary. Any questions about the grants or about the Initiative that had not already been addressed previously were expected to be brought to foundation staff for resolution. All decisions about grant matters were made by foundation staff, using information from a number of sources, including community applications, foundation site visits, and liaison reports.

At the same time, liaisons were considered a primary vehicle for ensuring ongoing and consistent communication with the Discovery community groups. This role went considerably beyond sharing specific information and clarifying messages, although this was included among their responsibilities. The liaisons, as one put it, “brought to communities the sense of the Memorial Fund’s accessibility and genuine support” and were the “human face of the Memorial Fund.” Their work allowed the Memorial Fund to invest time and attention in each community, in ways that the staff themselves were not able to do.

The liaison role in communication was intended to be two-way – from the Memorial Fund to the communities and from the communities to the Memorial Fund. What is telling about the relationship between the Memorial Fund and the communities in the Discovery Initiative is that, while communities recognized that the liaisons were the eyes and ears of the foundation, they did not see them as “spies,” but as “interested reporters” – that is, as someone who knew them well and cared about their success. In interviews conducted in mid-2007, community collaborative staff and members reported that the liaisons were an effective way for them to communicate with the Memorial Fund about challenges and issues, interests and needs, progress and setbacks at the local level. This information was seen as providing the foundation with realistic, real-time information that could be used to temper expectations and target resources.

#### **a. Communication Link from the Foundation to the Communities**

There were three specific ways in which the liaisons aided communication from the Memorial Fund to the communities. They reinforced the values of the foundation with communities – deep engagement of community residents, especially parents, in ways that made a difference in decision making; collaboration among agencies and organizations involved with young children and their families; and mobilization of diverse groups within the community. The liaisons worked with the community groups to help

them stay connected with the big picture. They were able to describe how local action plans contributed to the objectives of the Initiative and how the information and tools provided through the Initiative connected and reinforced each other. They were themselves a source of information about capacity-building opportunities and resources available to communities and helped collaborative groups identify those capacity-building supports that fit their needs and interests at specific points in their work.

These aspects of their role in communicating with the Initiative communities were described by the liaisons:

- “Liaisons are a way to make sure information and messages from the Memorial Fund get to communities.”
- “[Because I know] enough about the community and about the resources, I can make sure they don’t get left on the shelf and people actually use them.”
- “We make sure the values of Discovery are ever present – there is a core set of values and principles that is constantly being reinforced by the liaisons.”
- “We are modeling the philosophy of the Memorial Fund – helping communities reflect on what they are doing, asking what they need, not comparing communities, building from where communities are and their own goals.”
- “Bringing up the principles, bringing up that this is about community change – otherwise [the communities] would have focused on programs and activities.”

The community coordinators clearly valued this part of the liaison role. Almost three-quarters of the 43 coordinators interviewed in mid-2007 noted that the liaisons provided a link with the Memorial Fund’s vision, and two-thirds reported that liaisons helped clarify Memorial Fund messages and documents.

#### **b. Communication Link from the Communities to the Memorial Fund**

The liaisons provided one way for information from and about communities to be available to the Memorial Fund in close to “real time.” The foundation received annual applications that included summaries of community activities as well as plans for the future and made site visits on occasion throughout the Initiative and to all communities

in the summer of 2007. Still, the liaisons served as the foundation's direct link with communities on a continuous basis.

In reflecting on their contribution to the Initiative, the liaisons believed that informing foundation staff about community circumstances and experiences was critical. How they described their contribution in linking communities with the Memorial Fund included:

- “Being able to enhance what communities provide the Memorial Fund via reports and applications – interpreting and helping the Memorial Fund be closer to communities than would be otherwise possible.”
- “Bringing back [communicating] to the Memorial Fund what is not getting through clearly to the communities.”
- “Helping the Memorial Fund really understand the stories behind the work in communities – how they got there, what communities are struggling with, how they are using what the Memorial Fund is providing.”

Community collaborative staff and members also valued this aspect of the liaison role and saw it as contributing to the Memorial Fund's responsiveness to community conditions and needs:

- “It is my impression that they are the link back. They are telling the Memorial Fund how things are working or not working in communities. They are the reality check back to the Memorial Fund. They help the Memorial Fund frame things in ways that will be meaningful to communities.”
- “Because they all work with more than one collaborative, they can be the eyes and ears of the Memorial Fund and give the Memorial Fund a synthesis of the issues they see.”
- “The Memorial Fund has a mission to accomplish in making these grants and I assume the liaisons are playing a role in making sure that what is happening fits that mission. I assume they are reporting back to the Memorial Fund in ways

that would impact their plans and strategies. They are the voice from the front lines.”

## **2. Progress Tracking**

The Memorial Fund’s approach to working with communities during the Discovery Initiative has important implications for tracking their progress. In 2002 the Memorial Fund invited all 49 communities in Connecticut that had a priority school district or a district with a special needs school to participate in a planning phase for the Discovery Initiative.<sup>27</sup> All of these communities, regardless of the progress they had made during the planning period, were then invited to apply for implementation funding. There were some communities that did not apply at that time, and the Memorial Fund continued to make these funds available and encouraged these communities to apply at a later point. All subsequently did so. During the course of the Initiative, there were times when a community’s work seemed to come to a halt – there was no chair or coordinator for the collaborative group or the group’s membership dwindled. During those periods the grant funds may have been virtually unspent. Again, the Memorial Fund continued to hold open the door for these communities to re-organize and begin anew. By 2008, not only were the original 49 communities all actively participating in the Initiative, but another five that were newly eligible had joined as well.

Progress tracking in this context is quite different than in an initiative or grant program in which there is competition for a limited number of grants or where performance under prior grants is a critical factor in continued support. In the Discovery Initiative, community progress, based on where each started, was the most critical factor in assessing success. Community liaisons were expected, by the communities themselves as well as by the foundation, to contribute information and their own assessment to a process that focused on providing constructive feedback to communities and fine-tuning technical assistance to help them overcome obstacles to progress.

## **3. Technical Assistance**

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<sup>27</sup> These districts are designated by the Connecticut State Department of Education, based on information about family income.

For the first six years of the Discovery Initiative (from the planning period starting in 2002 through the first phase of implementation ending in 2007), technical assistance to the participating communities was designed by the Memorial Fund’s program officer and the Initiative’s capacity-building broker, with input and feedback from the liaisons. Initially, the liaisons were not expected to provide technical assistance per se, although occasionally one would provide on-site consultation on a specific topic to a community assigned to another liaison. The intent was to keep liaisons in the role of observer and coach, with a commitment to overall community progress and success but not making specific recommendations or directing community processes.<sup>28</sup>

Thus, during most of the Initiative, the liaisons’ primary role in technical assistance was behind the scenes in its development and in encouraging communities to take advantage of the technical assistance offered. As one liaison described it, “It’s like being eyes and ears in the communities – being able to identify problem areas, providing feedback to help [Memorial Fund] staff know what kinds of supports the communities need.” Another noted that one of the liaison’s contributions to the technical assistance strategy was to “think about ideas for resources and troubleshooting materials before they go out to communities – help imagine how [resources and materials] will be received or interpreted.” The foundation staff relied on the liaisons to direct communities to the available technical assistance opportunities and resources. More details on the ways in which the community liaisons supported the capacity-building strategies of the Initiative are described in a later chapter.

#### **4. Cross-site Learning**

The Memorial Fund offered ways in which communities could learn directly from each other – meetings or convenings to which multiple communities were invited; a listserv on which communities could post questions and exchange information; an Initiative website with technical support for posting materials on each community’s page; support for staff in experienced communities to visit and provide advice to other communities. The liaisons were expected to play a major role in encouraging peer exchange and in communicating other communities’ experiences and strategies. Assigning each liaison to a set of communities – usually between five and ten – and using regular liaison meetings to discuss common issues and strategies provided opportunities for liaisons to build a base of knowledge and experience about work in a number of communities.

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<sup>28</sup> As noted earlier, during 2009 the liaisons as a group were trained to offer workshops on community decision making.

The liaisons noted that the communities were generally very interested in the work in other communities, though often in the context of comparing progress. As one liaison noted, “sometimes that’s helpful, but there is a lot of anxiety, ‘how do we compare?’.” At the same time, sharing other communities’ experiences gave the liaisons the opportunity to provide reassurance that others were also struggling with many of the same issues, as well as to offer examples of successful strategies.

## **B. CHALLENGES IN MANAGING THE WORK OF COMMUNITY LIAISONS**

As noted above, the community liaisons in the Discovery Initiative helped the Memorial Fund deal with management issues that commonly arise in community change initiatives. At the same time, managing the work of the liaisons raised its own management challenges.

### **1. Remaining Faithful to Role Boundaries**

The Discovery Initiative liaisons were similar to coaches in other community change initiatives,<sup>29</sup> although there were critical differences.<sup>30</sup> The Memorial Fund staff worked directly with the liaisons, rather than through an intermediary organization, providing direction and support for their work. The liaisons were consultants to the foundation, not to the communities to which they were assigned by the foundation. Because of these characteristics, the liaison role had clear boundaries in two regards -- management decisions were in the hands of the foundation staff, and the liaison was not to take a lead in direction setting or proposal development or otherwise act on behalf of the community collaborative group.

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<sup>29</sup> See Hubbell and Emery, 2009d. Other perspectives on coaching in community change initiatives are described in Hubbell and Emery, 2009a, 2009b, and 2009c, as well as in Emery, Hubbell, and Salant, 2005.

<sup>30</sup> The Memorial Fund did not use the coach model as the basis for developing the community liaison role, although they share some similarities in duties and characteristics.

In the Discovery Initiative, one clear edge to these boundaries was well understood by the community groups – the liaison was not to tell the group what to do. Examples of how community coordinators described this include:

- “The liaison puts out two or three ideas – never pushes a particular idea.”
- “The liaison is there whenever you need them and yet lets you figure it out.”
- “The liaison strikes a very good balance – guides but never tells us what to do.”

The differentiation between the liaison role and the responsibility of foundation staff was also made clear. The liaisons acknowledged and appreciated this clarity, as noted in these comments:

- “While [the Memorial Fund staff] maintain their direct relationship with communities and take accountability for their decisions, they are clear about the supporting role of the liaisons by encouraging communities to communicate with their liaison.”
- “Communities do not view liaisons with any administrative role... We liaisons can clarify, illuminate, serve as a voice, but not from decision-making positions.”

At the same time, in some communities – particularly those that did not have a prior relationship with the Memorial Fund and experience with its partnership approach – explaining the liaison role was challenging. One liaison noted that “the most difficult aspect was explaining to communities what I wasn’t – not a monitor for the Memorial Fund, but a reflective person to help them see things differently. I would like the job description shared with communities – what a liaison is and isn’t – and include that in the grant agreement with the community.”

## **2. Managing Changes in Liaison Activities**

The Memorial Fund functions as a learning organization. Its staff are attentive and responsive both to emerging opportunities and challenges created by a changing state context and economic environment and to experiences and feedback from the

communities directly and through the liaisons. Throughout the course of the Initiative, while the objectives and core principles remained constant, specific strategies changed. For that reason, changes in the liaison activities over the course of the multi-year Discovery Initiative were inevitable. As the Memorial Fund staff noted in a 2008 interview, “As communities developed greater capacities and appetite to work collaboratively, they demanded more hands-on work, which the liaisons were well suited to deliver...the liaison role attached to their contracts is flexible enough to be responsive to changes in community conditions.” These changes were described in Chapter II.

At the same time, managing these changes presented its own challenges, particularly in communicating the extent and nature of the changes and in ensuring consistency in application across communities. The latter challenge is discussed below.

Some elements of the change in liaison activities were straight-forward to communicate – for example, allowing and then encouraging the liaisons to serve as facilitators for community self-assessment and planning processes. The decision to do this came out of conversation with liaisons about the value of having an outside facilitator to allow coordinators to participate in the group discussion. The goal was to be supportive to communities in going through a foundation-required process, and adding this activity to the liaison’s work was not intended to be seen as or evolve into a major change in their role. At the same time, this activity both built on the rapport and confidence that had been deepening between liaisons and the community groups and strengthened those relationships. Facilitating community assessment and planning processes also gave liaisons the opportunity to demonstrate their skills in a concrete way, as well engage in more extended discussions in which they could ask the group reflective questions.

This decision coincided with and probably contributed to changes in how directly the liaisons responded to questions and provided feedback. Liaisons believed that these changes were important in enhancing their effectiveness:

- “We started off as very hands off – we could attend meetings but not in a facilitative role...[When] we are silent and just asking questions, that doesn’t always make it clear that we are there to ‘incline them toward success’.”
- “My first year I followed the mantra – you are not there as a consultant, you are just holding up the mirror. I was doing the traditional once a month going to the

collaborative meeting and checking in with the coordinator. I wasn't using all my hours. I found this ineffective in moving a community. I personally feel I am most effective when I'm providing guidance, ideas and suggestions based on what I know about the community."<sup>31</sup>

This perceived change in overall approach – perhaps even more than the opportunity to use the liaisons to facilitate specific community processes – was greatly valued by the communities, as illustrated by the following comments:

- “I have been very grateful that the Memorial Fund has reviewed and changed the role of the liaison. I found it awkward in the very beginning to have the liaison at all of the meetings but silent.”
- “Our liaison would validate but not initiate a discussion or give suggestions – we were frustrated by that.”
- “A few years ago our liaison was quieter and we wished our liaison would guide us more. Now our liaison facilitates the processes more and gives us more feedback. They are able to push back when they think they should.”
- “We appreciate the fact that the liaison has shifted from a listener to more active support.”

At the same time, having the liaison participate directly in community processes presents a challenge in getting the mix right between engaging in the discussion versus keeping out of decision making. So, these changes have raised some concerns about the objectivity and outsider status of the liaison role and the extent to which the liaison was being directive on behalf of the foundation. As noted by one coordinator:

“Previously our liaison was really an observer of the collaborative table and only participated if asked or if we were floundering. Over the past year or so that role has changed – the Memorial Fund changed the role. Our community has

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<sup>31</sup> This perspective was also noted in Frusciante, 2009.

struggled with that – how to use the liaison as a resource without feeling it was the voice of the funder telling us what to do.”

### 3. Ensuring Consistency

With or without any changes in the liaison activities, ensuring consistent messages and approaches across several independent consultants with a variety of backgrounds and experiences is a challenge that the Discovery Initiative faced. On the one hand, the Memorial Fund provided a detailed set of expectations at key points in the Initiative and frequent and regular opportunities for liaisons to meet together with foundation staff to be briefed and to discuss issues and strategies. The expectation that liaisons would attend all capacity-building technical assistance sessions was another way in which consistency in liaison knowledge and skills was supported.

Because of the small number of liaisons and their infrequent turnover, formalized orientation or procedures manuals were not considered necessary by the foundation staff. As new liaisons came on board, each met with the program officer for an individualized briefing, and when community assignments changed, the incoming and outgoing liaisons planned a transition process with the program officer. On the other hand, liaisons who came on during the course of the Initiative did not have the benefit of a standardized training process or a written set of practices.<sup>32</sup> Also, the liaisons did not receive a systematic overview of early childhood education practice and policy, an area in which some felt they would have liked to have been better informed. Each drew on his or her own knowledge and experience and learned together as the Initiative proceeded.

It is also important that those working with communities have a shared understanding of the dimensions and metrics on which to assess progress, since this understanding will guide the work itself. Differences among the liaisons in the criteria and standards by which they assessed community progress were evident during the process of reviewing the community applications, particularly in 2007 when liaisons were asked to document in detail their rationale for specific ratings and to discuss them with foundation staff. Subsequently a tool was developed by staff and liaisons together that provided detailed definitions of each rating level (one through four) on a set of dimensions related to collaborative group functioning and community engagement and support. This tool not only standardized the annual progress assessment but also provided a guide for the liaisons in identifying areas for targeted focus in communities.<sup>33</sup>

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<sup>33</sup> Given the fact that only one liaison is assigned to each community and therefore only one has in-depth knowledge and experience of each community, directly assessing inter-rater reliability among the liaisons in using this tool would be difficult.



## **V. CHALLENGES IN THE POWER AND RESOURCE DIFFERENCES BETWEEN FUNDERS AND COMMUNITIES**

Differences in power and resources between funders and communities that exist in most community change initiatives can affect how much participants feel free to pursue changes that are actually needed or wanted in the community rather than what the funder is willing or interested in supporting. Similarly, these differences can affect the selection of strategies or approaches by community groups to pursue change. Depending on how open community participants and stakeholders are to considering innovative strategies or ones that have not been tried in the community before, funder preferences – expressed or assumed – for particular strategies can be helpful. However, this can also lead communities to pursue strategies that are not a good fit with their interests, resources, and capacities.

The lack of parity in power and resources can also affect the relationship between funder and community and communication between them. Communities may be wary of the consequences of raising tough issues, giving negative feedback, or “telling it like it is” to their funders. Funders may be concerned that what they intend as suggestions or options are taken as mandates, regardless of their intent.

The Memorial Fund has worked hard to exemplify a partnership approach in its work with communities.<sup>34</sup> The role of the community liaison was intended to make it easier for community members and groups to raise issues and concerns with and to receive information and feedback from someone who was not acting as a management agent of the foundation. The limitations on the liaison role in foundation decision-making and in directing or influencing community actions were intended to ensure that their role was understood by communities as being that of an objective “critical friend.”

### **A. COMMUNITY LIAISONS IN BRIDGING THE POWER AND RESOURCE GAP**

In the Discovery Initiative, the community liaisons were contracted as independent consultants to enhance the ability of the Memorial Fund to support the participating communities. Their role had specific boundaries in terms of how directive they were to be with the community collaborative groups – they were to assist in supporting the group’s consideration of action steps and annual plans, but not to give direction or participate in the decisions of the group. The liaisons were also intentionally not engaged in the foundation’s decision-making about community grants, although they were asked to provide information about each community’s plans and progress on an

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<sup>34</sup> See Leiderman and Studdiford, 2009, for stories of how this approach has played out in action.

annual basis. Thus, the liaisons were expected to be able to guide and support communities without carrying the weight of the “funder” role.

Overall, the liaison role in the Discovery Initiative appears to have been successful in bridging the power and resource gap between the foundation and the communities. As noted in an earlier chapter, the communities recognized and appreciated the fact that liaisons could not give directives or make decisions for the collaborative and understood that the liaisons could not make decisions on behalf of the foundation. They generally believed that liaisons accurately and completely communicated the foundation’s intent and expectations. Communities also believed that it was appropriate that the liaisons share information on community progress, challenges, and needs with the foundation and expected this information to make the foundation better informed and more responsive.

## **B. CHALLENGES IN USING LIAISONS TO BRIDGE THE GAP**

While the liaisons were successful in helping the Memorial Fund address some of the issues inherent in the foundation-community relationship, their bridging role also presented some challenges.

### **1. Balancing Non-Directiveness and Objectivity with Commitment to Helping Communities Succeed**

The liaisons were expected to be non-directive and objective observers, not only as a resource for the community groups but also for the Memorial Fund. They face the challenge of maintaining an outsider’s perspective while also creating the conditions for communities to succeed and for the foundation to have accurate information and realistic expectations. Comments from the liaisons indicated their awareness of the seriousness of this issue:

- “From the beginning we were cautioned that we are not an advocate for the community. We are not there to defend or represent the community. This is not easy. You have to be intentional and conscious about that.”

- “It’s a delicate dance – being an advocate for the community and promoting the positive things they are doing, while at the same time being clear about their challenges and failings.”
- “It’s inevitable, if you are in a community year after year, that you become more closely aligned with the communities. We are still more neutral than not, part of the Initiative but not part of the collaborative groups.”

One liaison noted that the antidote to the potential for over-identification with communities is a focus on community self-determination: “I need to believe in the work and see the Discovery goals and process as valuable, but it’s not my agenda or the Memorial Fund’s agenda, it’s the community’s agenda.”

## **2. Advice that is Misunderstood**

As the Memorial Fund program officer noted, “The challenge for liaisons is to stay neutral in cases when members or factions in community collaboratives disagree on an issue or decision that needs to be made, especially when in the liaison's view one of the sides is much more in keeping with the Memorial Fund or their own values. We believe that these struggles are best when worked out locally and not artificially resolved because the Memorial Fund or the liaison, who is often viewed as representing the Fund, take a particular view on the matter at hand.”

Even when the liaison’s advice or feedback was related to community processes, inevitably it was sometimes misunderstood or misconstrued. This can damage the liaison-community relationship and make further efforts by the liaison ineffective. Two types of situations that exemplify this challenge were observed in the Discovery Initiative, one reported by the liaison and one by the community.

An example from the viewpoint of the liaison illustrates the situation when suggestions from a liaison are interpreted as directives:

- “In Community X they wanted to hire a collaborative member as a consultant. I really tried to get them to understand the implications, that her relationship to the collaborative group would change. I tried every level of diplomacy to make this clear, but their reaction was, ‘We’re allowed to hire her, but you’re not allowing us to hire her.’”

The situation created some discomfort and resentment in the community, although it was not reported to have led to a breakdown in the community-liaison relationship. However, it is possible that in other instances a community group might no longer seek or accept liaison input or assume that liaison suggestions reflect what the foundation wishes.

The other example is one with the opposite, but equally negative, result. A community coordinator noted an example of when the liaison’s advice or feedback appeared to be at odds with what the foundation wanted or expected: “When we did our 2007 application and action plan, our liaison was part of the process but never communicated that we were submitting a plan that used a different format from other communities. So we were left feeling that this was an acceptable format [when it was not.]” This kind of misunderstanding can weaken the faith that communities have about the accuracy and timeliness of liaison representations of foundation expectations and reduce their effectiveness in facilitating funder-community communication.

## **VI. CHALLENGES IN BALANCING CONSISTENCY WITH RESPONSIVENESS**

Community initiatives by their nature are intended to move toward some shared goals and create some commonalities in experience from which shared knowledge and lessons learned can be drawn. Obviously, the greater the number of participants in an initiative, the more difficult it is to maintain consistency. At the same time, a theme in community change initiatives has been the need to be flexible, both in responding to specific community circumstances and in applying knowledge from the initiative in real time.

Brown and Fiester (2007) in their analysis of the Hewlett Foundation's Neighborhood Improvement Initiative note that one core competency needed by foundations in order to be successful in supporting community change initiatives is "the ability to take a learning stance throughout the entire enterprise." They attribute specific difficulties in this regard in the Hewlett initiative to lack of trust needed to share information and engage in constructive reflection. It is equally important that both communities and the foundation be willing to acknowledge to themselves when modifications in approach are needed and have the commitment from their stakeholders to allow modifications to be made.

As noted earlier, the Memorial Fund's approach to working with all its grantees has been one of listening, learning, and responding to experience and lessons. The community liaisons have played an important role in the foundation's ability to carry out this approach with the large number of communities in the Discovery Initiative. They have also been an instrument for holding the community groups to the core vision and principles guiding the Initiative. At the same time, using several consultants who work on a continuing but part-time basis with a subset of the communities has itself posed some challenges in maintaining consistency in the Initiative.

### **A. LIAISONS IN ENSURING CONSISTENCY IN APPLICATION OF INITIATIVE STRATEGIES**

The Memorial Fund used a number of methods to ensure that the community groups and stakeholders across the communities participating in the Discovery Initiative received consistent messages about its goals, strategies, expectations, processes, and support. These included:

- Orientation meetings held at the beginning of each grant year and at transition points during the Initiative
- An annual conference
- Capacity-building sessions
- E-mails to coordinators with updates and reminders
- A website as a source of information on upcoming events and an archive of capacity-building materials
- A weekly e-mailed newsletter highlighting key resources and time-sensitive announcements as well as a listserv among the Discovery communities

While some of these methods were intended to be “stand-alone,” in most instances the liaisons were expected to reiterate, reinforce, and remind the community groups of the key elements and principles of the Initiative and of the resources available for their use. Through their frequent contact and long-term relationships with communities, they were well positioned to identify and use “teachable moments” as they arose. In addition, the liaisons often provided an orientation to the Initiative and of the history of the work in the community when new coordinators were hired. Two comments from community coordinators illustrate how liaisons were seen as contributing to consistency in the Initiative: “Our liaison interjects the Memorial Fund mantra to make sure we are in step,” and “The liaisons assure a consistent message and approach is applied across communities.”

## **B. LIAISONS IN ENSURING RESPONSIVENESS TO COMMUNITY DIFFERENCES**

The Discovery Initiative differed from some other community change initiatives in that it did not set “readiness” criteria for communities to participate. All communities in Connecticut in which the local school district met the State Department of Education’s definition of priority or special need based on family economic circumstances were invited. It is a testament to the Memorial Fund’s patience and perseverance that all 49 invited communities, as diverse as they were, eventually joined the Initiative and that all continued to participate through 2009.

The Discovery communities were from all regions of the state and included urban, suburban, and rural areas; some had substantial non-white, particularly African-

American and Hispanic, populations, while others were more racially and ethnically homogeneous (generally white); all had some diversity in the economic circumstances of their residents, but some were more affluent overall than others. The communities also varied substantially in how much experience they had with community collaboration on early childhood issues, and the communities continued to be on varying pathways in their collaborative work during the Initiative's course. Thus, from the beginning community differences on many dimensions were acknowledged and accepted. The Initiative's capacity building strategy took these differences into account by designing and delivering information and training. While, in many cases, capacity-building supports – workshops and tools – were designed to benefit communities that were early in the work of collaboration, meetings in which these supports were presented and discussed were sometimes organized by level of prior experience. In addition, some supports were delivered to communities grouped by geographic region.

The liaisons played an important role in helping the foundation understand the nuances of community differences and the varying trajectories of development across the communities. The liaisons provided real-time and real-world input to the foundation as it learned from the Initiative experience and continued to fine-tune strategies and expectations. The liaisons provided information to the foundation in a formal assessment of each community's progress annually, and more informally through conversations with staff and at monthly liaison-staff meetings. This information helped the Memorial Fund craft technical assistance supports that met diverse community needs. Information from the liaisons also helped sustain community engagement with the Initiative by identifying critical points at which direct intervention by Memorial Fund staff in particular communities via personal conversations or site visits would be helpful.

### **C. CHALLENGE IN USING LIAISONS TO ENSURE CONSISTENCY AND RESPONSIVENESS**

The community liaisons were intended to provide a vehicle for the foundation to learn about and respond to differences among communities within the framework of the Initiative's values and goals. A challenge to ensuring consistency while being responsive was presented by the assignment of single individuals to each community. As one liaison noted, "A challenging side of the work is that you are by yourself. Sometimes it feels a little shaky, making judgments about what's going on. But there is no way around that – we come together, but in the moment out there you have to make judgments."

The Initiative offered two kinds of opportunities for liaisons to observe each other and develop common approaches to their practice. One was at times when a liaison was providing technical assistance in another's community, which occurred occasionally during the Initiative. The other was during the 2009 train-the-trainer sessions designed to prepare the liaisons to conduct community decision-making workshops for the communities as a way to offer this technical assistance "on the ground" making use of the liaison resources . Liaisons reported that both kinds of opportunities were valuable, although infrequent:

- "I have learned a lot in this train-the-trainers work by observing fellow liaisons and working together to develop the regional sessions."
- "I have had other liaisons come into my communities to deliver technical assistance, which has been good for me to see how other liaisons approach issues."

Given limited resources, using the liaisons efficiently and offering opportunities for direct observation of each other's practice is a difficult balance.

## VI. CHALLENGES IN SUPPORTING COMMUNITY CAPACITY BUILDING

Funders generally have greater access to and capacity to gather, digest, and apply new information than do community groups. In fact, many funders see a major part of their responsibility to bring new knowledge, best practices, and tools to communities to help build local capacity for leadership, strategic planning, collaborative decision-making, communication and public education, mobilization and advocacy, and other change activities. The power difference between funders and communities can distort how offers of such support are perceived by community groups – that is, to be required regardless of value or interest.

In initiatives engaging many communities, limited resources and an interest in efficiency may lead a funder to offer training, information, or technical assistance to groups of communities at the same time, through meetings or dissemination of written materials. Along with the other consequences of the power and resource differences discussed earlier, this approach may encourage community groups to attend workshops or participate in technical assistance, regardless of likely immediate applicability, because they believe this is expected or required. Besides affecting the openness of the funder-community relationship, this pattern may drain local resources, including the scarce time of collaborative members and staff, which might be better used on more relevant activities.

In addition, research and experience in many settings has demonstrated that it is often difficult for information conveyed to one or two people from a community in a group or class setting to be translated into action at home.<sup>35</sup> Factors that inhibit this transfer include the power of naysayers in the community, the press of other work when attendees return to the community, and the fact that what is conveyed in workshops can rarely be directly applied in the community without some modification.<sup>36</sup> Bringing in on-

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<sup>35</sup> The Discovery Initiative experience with its technical assistance offerings was in line with this observation. The Initiative began experimenting with an “institute” approach to technical assistance workshops – offering a series of workshops to be attended by a consistent team of individuals from each community who committed to carrying out relevant activities between workshop sessions. This approach was first used with regard to kindergarten transition planning beginning in 2006 and was the approach used in providing technical assistance during 2008 and 2009 around facilitative leadership, community decision-making, and results-based accountability.

<sup>36</sup> Hubbell and Emery, 2009a.

site expertise can be effective, particularly if provided over time to a consistent set of participants with motivation and power to implement what they learn. However, this approach can be quite expensive and, without deep knowledge of the community and a relationship of trust, may not be as successful as expected.

Coaches in community change initiatives have been used to help community leaders and groups develop the capacity to apply information and skills to do their own work.<sup>37</sup> The liaisons in the Discovery Initiative took on many roles similar to those of coaches in other initiatives, including suggesting resources, connecting a community with others doing similar work or facing similar issues, reminding groups about upcoming workshops and events, and helping them make use of tools and information available on the Initiative's website or from other sources. At the same time, liaisons differed from the role of coaches in other initiatives in two ways: they primarily used the values of collaboration and community and parent engagement, rather than strategies or goals, as the framework for their feedback to communities; and they generally responded to, rather than initiated, requests for feedback and input.

## **A. DIRECT CONTRIBUTIONS OF LIAISONS TO COMMUNITY CAPACITY BUILDING**

### **1. How Liaisons Directly Supported Community Capacity**

One liaison had a succinct way of outlining the ways in which liaisons support the work in the Discovery communities:

- Help communities define their own local vision, their own local version of Discovery
- Be an informed but neutral<sup>38</sup> sounding board
- See the range of issues and keep options open for the community
- Call attention to less frequently heard voices

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<sup>37</sup> Hubbell and Emery, 2009c.

<sup>38</sup> Where "neutral" refers to being objective and non-directive, rather than uninterested.

Many communities also found the liaisons vital in helping the group stay focused on the larger goals of the Initiative, as illustrated by this remark by a coordinator, “Our liaison makes sure we don’t get bogged down in little tiny details – helps us keep the big picture in mind, what do we want this community to accomplish?”

As noted in an earlier chapter, liaisons generally attended the collaborative group meetings, but also worked individually with the local coordinator or chair. One coordinator reported that “I consider the liaison like a trusted friend – I can run things by her and ask ‘what do you think?’.” One liaison noted that some coordinators have a natural confidant within their community, while others do not, and that in the latter case the liaison can serve that role. Over the course of the Initiative, the liaisons often became more of a coach to coordinators and chairs, as a way of building their capacities to lead the work. When a new coordinator was hired, it was often the liaison who provided an overview and history of the Initiative, shared resources and materials, and helped him or her understand and define the coordinator role.

Mid-way through the Initiative liaisons were allowed and then expected to be the facilitator for certain processes in their communities – specifically the annual assessment and planning process that led up to the preparation of the application for grant renewal. In this respect, the liaison became more like a consultant to the community, but able to draw on their in-depth knowledge. As one liaison noted, “It was such a relief to communities when the liaisons were allowed to facilitate [the planning and assessment tool]. It meant that the coordinators could participate in the process without bringing in someone who didn’t know the community...In my facilitation role, I say things that give them a pat on the back, supporting them but not butting in...It’s all well and good to be a ‘mirror’ but when we facilitate meetings we can also play a neutral role in helping all people have a say.”

## **2. How Liaisons Promoted Community Use and Application of Other Capacity Building Supports**

Throughout the Initiative, liaisons helped communities take advantage of technical assistance and resources available. They reminded collaborative groups about upcoming workshops and events and encouraged them to attend. They referred the group to resources available on the Discovery website from previous workshops and

from other sources. They gave orientations to and assisted in working through some toolkits, particularly in the areas of parent engagement and strategic communications. They used their awareness of the resources available and knowledge of each specific community's developmental needs to maximize the likelihood that the Initiative's capacity-building supports were put to good use.

When the Initiative's technical assistance became focused in three areas in 2008 – expanding community leadership, using results to drive action plans, and engaging in broad-based community planning – the liaisons became learners with the communities as they participated in the seminars and workshops. While they were still expected to encourage communities to take advantage of the technical assistance offerings, they were somewhat hampered by their own limited familiarity with the specific terminology and tools and by the belief among many communities that these workshops were intended for a subset of communities receiving additional funds to work on a community-wide early childhood plan. In 2009, the liaisons received specific training in community decision making and results based accountability and conducted orientation sessions with groups of communities. The liaisons were then expected to continue to support communities in these areas.

## **B. CHALLENGES IN USING LIAISONS IN CAPACITY BUILDING**

While the community liaisons were a vital part of the Discovery Initiative's capacity-building approach, both in theory and in practice, there were also challenges. These challenges became more apparent and more critical as the liaisons became more active in facilitating collaborative processes and providing technical assistance.

### **1. Differences among Liaisons in Experience, Skills, and Knowledge**

One of the reasons that positions such as community liaisons are used in community initiatives is because the number of communities involved is more than foundation staff can work with on their own. Individuals hired to fill these positions generally have short-term, part-time assignments on a particular initiative and, as consultants, are often expected to bring with them the necessary knowledge and skills to carry out these assignments with limited investment by the funder. To the extent that community liaisons or coaches do not have a common base of experience and capacities, it is likely that the communities they work with will experience different levels of support.

As noted in earlier sections, the liaisons in the Discovery Initiative shared some characteristics related to their responsibilities, but also varied in their training and practical experience. In addition, the liaisons did not receive a uniform orientation to their roles, although they met regularly as a group with staff for information exchange and peer sharing and had one-on-one sessions periodically with the program officer. Since the liaisons differed in their interpretation of the community capacities that the Initiative was intended to promote, this may have contributed to differences in the advice and feedback that communities received. Memorial Fund staff noted that liaisons did not all understand and interpret in a consistent way the dimensions of progress that the communities were expected to make. This led to the development of a detailed set of rubrics for liaisons to use in assigning progress ratings and guide their feedback and advice to communities. Providing the liaisons with in-depth training on specific technical assistance tools and frameworks was also valuable in building a shared base of knowledge and techniques.

## **2. Maintaining the Line between Liaison and Consultant**

If individuals in liaison or coaching roles move more toward providing technical assistance or training in the communities they work with, the line between being an external observer who facilitates communication and reflection and being a consultant providing expert advice and guiding decisions may become blurred. Even offering advice and giving feedback may bring up this issue, as two liaisons noted:

- “Sometimes I struggle with whether I am a liaison or an on-site technical assistance consultant – I don’t see the line anymore.”
- “Sometimes I feel that I’m a consultant to these communities – they pick my brain and it is technical assistance that we are providing them. But the Memorial Fund has been clear that we are not consultants, although we are in there doing what consultants do.”

In the Discovery Initiative, the liaisons were to serve as go-betweens to support communication and provide both the communities and the foundation with information to guide their respective work. Even within that limited activity, liaisons struggled with aspects of the liaison-consultant dilemma: “Because it isn’t a staff role, the foundation needs to recognize that we are in tough positions. To what extent do I keep confidentiality and to what extent do I bring issues to the foundation?”

When liaisons became more directly involved in providing technical assistance, this issue became an internal one as well. As one liaison noted, “it would be confusing for the liaison to both work on a project of the collaborative and be the collaborative’s critical friend as well.” As noted earlier, the community groups relied on the liaisons to act as an objective observer and to give unbiased feedback on the collaborative’s work and progress. When a liaison was more explicit in giving advice or suggesting options, even if intending to do so in a non-directive way, this sometimes led to misunderstanding and resentment, affecting how the liaison is engaged. The question of whether an objective stance would be possible when the liaison was directly involved in helping the community define its goals and craft its strategies became more salient during the course of the Initiative, but remains unanswered.

### **3. Building Local Capacity to Fulfill Liaison Functions**

The community liaisons in the Discovery Initiative had the dual advantages of (usually) long and deep knowledge of the communities with which they were working and an outsider’s perspective with information and skills from their work with other initiatives, groups, and communities. This insider-outsider vantage point made them particularly valuable to the Discovery communities, most of which had few local options – either the funds to employ consultants on their own or individuals in the community who could play this role. However, when the Discovery Initiative ends, so will support for the liaisons. A critical challenge for this and other efforts with the expectation for time-limited funding is how to sustain functions such as those provided by the liaisons. One liaison described this challenge in her work in a particular community:

“I’ve been more interventionist with them; I’ve been stronger with them because they’re really floundering. They have a weak coordinator who doesn’t know how to move the group forward. I feel like I’ve been more of a consultant with them. I’m worried about creating dependency; I was just asked, if the community doesn’t get funding in the future, will they still have access to me.”

While the Initiative intended to build capacity within the communities to “analyze, reflect, organize, and act,” it was often difficult to find within the community the equivalent to what the liaison brought to that effort – an outside perspective, someone who knows the community but can still ask “naïve” questions that no one else wants to raise, and a facilitator whose voice was not needed in the discussion as was that of the collaborative staff and members. In the fall of 2009, as the Memorial Fund was making plans for the

next phase of the Discovery Initiative, options for using community liaisons were being considered. However, as of that point the Initiative had not yet engaged communities in identifying liaison functions they believed important to continue. Further, while training in facilitative leadership had been provided to communities in 2008 and 2009, coaching and training specifically focused on helping communities develop their own capacity to carry out critical liaison functions themselves had not yet been provided.

## **VII. LESSONS LEARNED FROM THE DISCOVERY INITIATIVE**

### **ABOUT USING COMMUNITY LIAISONS TO SUPPORT COMMUNITY CHANGE**

The community liaison role in the Discovery Initiative is an essential component of the foundation's strategy to promote community change on behalf of young children. It was a complex role, positioned between the foundation itself and the community groups formed to implement the Initiative in approximately 50 localities across the state of Connecticut. This chapter summarizes the lessons learned about the liaison approach to supporting community change and outlines some recommendations for strengthening that approach in future efforts.

#### **A. SUMMARY**

##### **1. What This Approach Offers in Supporting Community Change**

Community liaisons – independent consultants hired by the funder to work directly with communities – can contribute to the implementation of a multi-year, multi-site community change initiative in a number of ways, as demonstrated in the Discovery Initiative.

- Liaisons can support foundation staff in reinforcing two-way communication between the foundation and communities, in learning about and assessing community progress, in connecting communities with technical assistance, and in facilitating cross-community learning.
  
- Liaisons can help reduce the negative consequences of the power and resource gap between funders and community groups by developing a relationship of trust and openness with community members.
  
- As skilled facilitators and process consultants, and trained in the areas of technical assistance offered during the Initiative, the liaisons can offer themselves as resources to the community groups.

- Liaisons can provide a vehicle for foundations to balance consistency of information and messages with responsiveness to community differences by providing real-time and real-world input and feedback.
- Liaisons can encourage and support community uptake of technical assistance as well as provide technical assistance themselves.
- Based on their knowledge and experience in communities, liaisons can assist foundations in defining reasonable and measurable markers of progress, particularly in areas open to interpretation such as the development of community capacity for change.

## **2. Limitations and Challenges of This Approach**

The liaison approach is complex, particularly with a large number of communities and several liaisons over an extended period of time. The challenges in the liaison approach encountered and to varying degrees addressed in the Discovery Initiative included:

- Setting boundaries on the liaison role, particularly with regard to foundation and community decision-making
- Defining the liaison's relationship to the community and to the foundation as dual recipients of liaison services, especially in providing information and feedback
- Managing changes in liaison responsibilities over time as the circumstances of the initiative and community needs change

- Ensuring consistency in liaison understanding of their roles and responsibilities and of the initiative goals and expectations
- Addressing differences in liaison experience, skills, and knowledge
- Balancing non-directiveness and an outsider's perspective with a commitment to helping communities succeed, particularly when communities are struggling
- Handling situations in which what the liaison does or says is misunderstood or misconstrued
- Managing the isolation of liaison work and building shared practices
- Building local capacity to carry on key liaison functions once foundation support ends

## **B. RECOMMENDATIONS FOR THE FIELD**

The contribution and value of the liaison role in the Discovery Initiative was due to several inter-related factors. The partnership approach of the Memorial Fund, particularly in listening and being responsive to the communities, was a hallmark of its prior work and continued to be demonstrated during the Initiative. The skills and experience of the individuals who filled the liaison positions were a good fit with the roles they were expected to play with communities and with the Memorial Fund. The liaisons placed value on collaborative and inclusive community processes at the same time they had a strong commitment to helping communities do better for young children. The communities received relatively small grants that were generally not sufficient to engage their own consultants and many were new to collaboration. The Memorial Fund invested substantial financial resources and staff time in supporting liaisons in their work while maintaining responsibility for the foundation's actions and decisions.

The Memorial Fund program officer and the community liaisons were asked what they would recommend to other foundations considering using such a role in a community

change initiative. The perspectives of both were remarkably consistent in the following areas:

- Defining a role for liaisons that situates them between the funder and the community
- Ensuring that the liaison role is clearly defined and communicated
- Selecting the right individuals for the position
- Providing orientation, training, supervision, and support

### **1. Value of Being Neither Foundation Staff nor Community Consultant**

Both foundation staff and liaisons firmly believed that the liaison role as defined in the Discovery Initiative – neither a staff member nor a community consultant – was a valuable approach to supporting community change and would recommend it for other initiatives. One liaison’s remarks express the general response well: “I would definitely say ‘do it.’ I feel like it’s been effective. Communities don’t have to pay for having a long-term relationship with a consultant who is on retainer.”

Staff and liaisons considered alternatives to the liaison role – using foundation staff to carry out similar functions and providing communities with the resources to obtain consultant services. Both of these alternatives were believed to have significant disadvantages compared to the liaison role in the Discovery Initiative.

When considering the implications of foundation staff attempting to carry out the liaison role, the concerns raised included:

- Inability to be a critical friend without invoking the power of being the funder – “There is something called positional authority – no way are people going to forget that you as staff have that kind of authority.”
- The likelihood that foundation staff would not have all the skills necessary for the work, in particular process facilitation skills.

- Staff’s limited availability to communities and lack of flexibility in scheduling, given other program and administrative commitments.

A key advantage mentioned for having foundation staff work directly with communities is related to their comprehensive understanding and perspective on the initiative. “Staff would be more informed about how all the pieces fit together.” While using staff in this way may be cost-effective in some circumstances, the experience in the Discovery Initiative was that this was not feasible, given the large number of communities involved.

The alternative approach of providing funds so that communities could retain consultants on their own was also viewed as having substantial disadvantages. Consultants working with the communities as their clients would be unlikely to be able to fully and accurately represent the foundation’s principles and messages. At the same time, consultants might find it more difficult to provide a disinterested perspective or be as hard-nosed about asking probing questions or raising concerns. There would be the expectation that the consultant would give answers, not just ask questions and be reflective. Ensuring consistency and quality across multiple consultants working independently for different communities would be more difficult. Such an approach also assumes that all communities have the knowledge and experience to choose and manage work with consultants.

## **2. Role Definition**

One of the clearest recommendations from Memorial Fund staff and the Discovery Initiative community liaisons to other funders and initiative managers was to define the role carefully and communicate it clearly to all stakeholders. Specific recommendations in this area included:

- Be very clear about what the liaison is and isn’t – clear to the funder, the liaison, and the community grantees. It is a very unorthodox role – people get comfortable in thinking about it in a more typical way – as facilitator, TA providers, community consultant. A lack of clarity will lead to conflict.
- Provide a description and parameters of what the liaison is expected to do and is not allowed to do, and use as many tools and opportunities to communicate these as possible.

- Openly and explicitly differentiate the roles of liaison and program officer.
- Invest the time to understand the issues that go along with working in communities
- As the role evolves, be as intentional as possible, keeping the initiative's goals in mind and considering ramifications of change.

### **3. Selection and Assignments**

Once the role has been defined, the necessary experience, training, and personal characteristics can be specified. One caution suggested by the Discovery Initiative experience is to avoid overvaluing expertise in content knowledge (such as in early care and education or child development). The most valuable skills that liaisons bring are in encouraging and supporting change processes undertaken by community groups.

Liaisons in the Discovery Initiative were assigned to each community by the foundation, often to maximize geographic proximity and reduce travel time. The Initiative's experience suggests that greater attention to matching liaisons with communities based on specific skill sets and personality might be useful. The possibility of engaging communities in selecting their liaison was proposed, as was rotating liaison assignments to broaden their experience and lessen the risk of over-identification and loss of objectivity.

### **4. Orientation, Training, Supervision, and Support**

Both staff and liaisons strongly recommended substantial investment in initial orientation and training. One scenario would be to use a retreat format for both team building and skill development, particularly in process facilitation. Areas for initial orientation included the foundation's values and expectations, the initiative goals and strategies, and the liaison role and responsibilities and how it fits with other initiative components. Even though the turnover in liaisons during the Discovery Initiative was minimal, it did occur; orientation of new liaisons in the midst of an evolving process might include using experienced individuals as mentors.

Monthly meetings between staff and liaisons were recommended for both peer learning and initiative management. In addition, staff recommended working with individual liaisons to set specific goals in their work with each community and regular one-on-one meetings to review progress, discuss strategies, and refine goals as necessary. The liaisons recommended that communities be asked to provide regular feedback on the parameters of the role and on individual liaison performance.

Assessing and giving feedback on individual liaison performance is important, but the nature of the liaison role can make it difficult. The liaison is not a staff member for whom employee reviews are appropriate, nor a consultant with a specific set of tasks and services to provide. Measures of best practice and performance results do not exist to guide supervision of liaisons.

### **C. CONCLUSION**

The use of liaisons in the Discovery Initiative represented a major investment on the part of the Memorial Fund in supporting the development of community collaborative groups and building their capacity to promote and guide community efforts on behalf of young children. Through the liaisons, community collaborative groups were provided with a resource that most would not have been able to find or utilize on their own: a long-term relationship with an individual who brought an informed but objective perspective, who promoted a consistent set of values and goals while encouraging each community to identify and pursue its own course, and who connected community groups with information, tools, and peer connections at times and in ways that would be most helpful. While this strategy itself presented challenges and required attention and resources, overall the use of community liaisons was an effective way to manage a large-scale community change initiative, bridge the power and resource gap between funder and community, balance consistency with responsiveness in working with a large number of diverse communities, and support community capacity building. As such, the use of community liaisons is an approach that could have value in other community change initiatives.

**APPENDIX A:**  
**DETAILED ELEMENTS OF LIAISON DUTIES, 2002**

**Relationship Management:**

- Listen to community and facilitate dialogue between the community and GMF
- Act as critical friend and sounding board for community
- Collect information on community progress, challenges, and opportunities
- Translate GMF values, principles, and intentions into practice for community
- Respond to calls or requests from individual community members and the collaborative
- Provide information to GMF on how knowledge development, public will, and capacity building grants and strategies can support and advance community agenda
- Inform communities of statewide activities, initiatives, and opportunities, and make connections
- Consult with Senior Program Officer on strategies and approaches
- Help to ensure that a consistent message and approach is being applied across communities
- Facilitate the coordination of Discovery-related supports and activities in the community

**Capacity Building**

- Consult with the community on the practical application of GMF core values and principles including: collaboration, parent engagement, inclusion, and the collection of baseline data
- Consult on specific implementation issues, and assist the community in solving problems
- Provide advice to GMF and communities on the skill sets that are needed locally to advance the community agenda
- Assist in the transfer and application of new tools and methods from cross-site seminars
- Identify internal community capacity, expertise, and skills
- Assess community TA requests and present analysis of issues to Senior Program Officer

- Assist communities to develop “scope of work” for site-based TA and content consultation
- In collaboration with the community, monitor TA and provide feedback to capacity building broker
- Provide input to the design of cross-site learning seminars, participate in seminars that the assigned community attends, and facilitate seminar break-out groups as needed
- Participate in liaison skill building/training sessions

## APPENDIX B: TIMELINE OF LIAISON ROLES AND ACTIVITIES

	2002	2006	2008
<b>General/Background</b>	Community Liaison Consultant(s) will be engaged to manage a portfolio of communities...participating in the Discovery process	GMF has retained individual consultants to work with a portfolio of communities. Community liaisons have a background in community planning, collaboration and parent engagement. The liaisons are contracted for a specified number of hours on an annual basis.	<p>[Questions &amp; answers about the community liaison role in 2008-2009, especially as relates to community planning grant activities and consultants]</p> <p>All of us are learning together to help communities succeed in developing comprehensive community plans without losing sight of the importance of process. More than ever, liaisons will need to manage time, make choices about participating in activities and being a resource to communities.</p>
<b>Experience/Training</b>	<p>Working knowledge of grants process in a foundation setting (grant making, management, monitoring)</p> <p>Working knowledge of:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Connecticut context</li> <li>• Status of children in Connecticut</li> <li>• Child and family serving institutions and systems (in particular the early care system)</li> <li>• Processes of identifying community assets and working within a strength-based frame</li> <li>• Evaluation processes and dynamics</li> </ul>		

	2002	2006	2008
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Effective use of technical assistance</li> <li>• Dynamics of working with parents and grassroots communities</li> </ul>		
<b>Skills/Abilities</b>	<p>The Community Liaison should have strong:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Listening skills</li> <li>• Oral and written communication skills</li> <li>• Observation and analysis skills</li> <li>• Problem solving skills</li> <li>• Facilitation skills</li> <li>• Interpersonal skills</li> </ul>		
<b>Duties/Responsibilities</b>	<p>Information Management: Maintain a current profile on each assigned community. The profile will include information on community characteristics, demographics, local culture and overall status of children.</p> <p>Relationships: The Community Liaison will function as the information link between the foundation and the Discovery communities.</p> <p>Documentation: The Community Liaison will be responsible for the documentation of work within community and reporting on such activities to the foundation.</p> <p>Capacity Building: The Liaison will, as</p>		

	2002	2006	2008
	<p>a member of the program management team, participate in the development of an initiative-wide capacity building approach for the Discovery communities.</p> <p>Knowledge Development: The Community Liaison will contribute to knowledge development at the Memorial Fund and in the field by regular and systematic collection of lessons learned throughout implementation of Discovery.</p> <p>Public Will: The Liaison will be a resource and facilitator of actions, research and activities that assist community in building an informed constituency for children.</p> <p>Resource Allocation: Assist program management team and Executive Director in developing recommendations for future resource allocation plans.</p> <p>Community Connections: The Community Liaison will be a critical link between and within communities participating in Discovery.</p>		
<p><b>Specific Duties:</b> <b>Relationship Management</b></p>	<p><b>Relationship Management:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Listen to community and facilitate two-way dialogue between the</li> </ul>	<p><b>Relationship Management:</b> Functions as an information link between GMF and the community</p>	

	2002	2006	2008
	<p>community and GMF</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Act as a critical friend and sounding board for community</li> <li>• Collect data/information on community progress, challenges and opportunities</li> <li>• Translate GMF values, principles and intentions into practice to community</li> <li>• Respond to calls/requests from individual community members and collaborative</li> <li>• Provide information to GMF on how knowledge development, public will and capacity building grants and strategies can support and advance community agendas</li> <li>• Inform communities of statewide activities, initiatives, and opportunities and make connections</li> <li>• Consult with Senior Program Officer on strategies and approaches</li> <li>• Ensure a consistent message and approach is being applied across communities</li> <li>• Facilitate the coordination of Discovery related supports and activities in community</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Listen to community and facilitate two-way dialogue between the community and GMF</li> <li>• Act as a critical friend and sounding board for community</li> <li>• Collect data/information on community progress, challenges and opportunities</li> <li>• Translate GMF values, principles and intentions into practice to community</li> <li>• Respond to calls/requests from individual community members and collaborative</li> <li>• Provide information to GMF on how knowledge development, public will and capacity building grants and strategies can support and advance community agendas</li> <li>• Inform communities of statewide activities, initiatives, and opportunities and make connections</li> <li>• Consult with Senior Program Officer on strategies and approaches</li> <li>• Ensure a consistent message and approach is being applied across communities</li> <li>• Facilitate the coordination of Discovery related supports and</li> </ul>	

	2002	2006	2008
		activities in community	
<b>Specific Duties: Capacity Building</b>	<p><b>Capacity Building:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Ongoing consultation with the community on the practical application of GMF core values and principles including collaboration, parent engagement, inclusion and the collection of baseline data</li> <li>• Periodic community-based problem-solving consultation based on observations of progress and community requests for feedback on specific implementation issues</li> <li>• Provide advice on the skills sets that are needed locally to advance the community agenda</li> <li>• Assist in the transfer and application of new tools and methods from cross-site seminars</li> <li>• Identify internal community capacity, expertise and skills</li> <li>• Assess community TA needs and present analysis to Senior Program Officer</li> <li>• Assist communities to develop “scope of work” for site-based TA and content consultation</li> <li>• Jointly monitor with the community the provision of site-based TA and provide feedback to the capacity building broker</li> <li>• Provide input to the design of cross-site learning seminars, participate in</li> </ul>	<p><b>Capacity Building:</b> Participates in the development and implementation of initiative-wide capacity building activities</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Ongoing consultation with the community on the practical application of GMF core values and principles including collaboration, parent engagement, inclusion and the s</li> <li>• Periodic community-based problem-solving consultation based on observations of progress and community requests for feedback on specific implementation issues</li> <li>• Provide advice on the skills sets that are needed locally to advance the community agenda</li> <li>• Assist in the transfer and application of new tools and methods from cross-site seminars</li> <li>• Identify internal community capacity, expertise and skills</li> <li>• Assess community TA needs and present analysis to Senior Program Officer</li> <li>• Assist communities to develop “scope of work” for site-based</li> </ul>	

	2002	2006	2008
	seminars that assigned communities attend and facilitate seminar break-out groups as needed <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Participate in liaison skill-building/training sessions</li> </ul>	TA and content consultation <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Jointly monitor with the community the provision of site-based TA and provide feedback to the capacity building broker</li> <li>• Provide input to the design of cross-site learning seminars, participate in seminars that assigned communities attend and facilitate seminar break-out groups as needed</li> <li>• Participate in liaison skill-building/training sessions</li> </ul>	
<b>Specific Duties:</b> <b>Knowledge Development</b>	<b>Knowledge Development:</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Document community and individual learning</li> <li>• Pose learning questions to the community and GMF</li> <li>• Provide feedback to GMF on overall Discovery design and implementation</li> <li>• Assist in the transfer and exchange of knowledge within and between communities</li> </ul>	<b>Knowledge Development:</b> Regularly collect and share lessons learned <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Document community and individual learning</li> <li>• Pose learning questions to the community and GMF</li> <li>• Provide feedback to GMF on overall Discovery design and implementation</li> <li>• Assist in the transfer and exchange of knowledge within and between communities</li> </ul>	
<b>Specific Duties:</b> <b>Public Will Building</b>	<b>Public Will Building:</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Identify opportunities for community voice to be heard around statewide policy issues</li> <li>• Connect community to policy resources and networks</li> </ul>	<b>Public Will Building:</b> Is a resource and facilitator of actions and research activities that assist community in building an informed constituency for young children <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Identify opportunities for</li> </ul>	

	2002	2006	2008
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Encourage community to consider issues of communications throughout their work</li> </ul>	<p>community voice to be heard around statewide policy issues</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Connect community to policy resources and networks</li> <li>Encourage community to consider issues of communications throughout their work</li> </ul>	
<b>Scope of Services</b>	<p>Allocate an average of two hours per week to each community. This contact may be initiated by either the liaison or the community and may vary from week to week. For each assigned community the monthly hours should not exceed eight.</p> <p>Visit each assigned community...The frequency of visits will be based on community need, technical assistance strategy and resource availability.</p> <p>Have monthly phone contact with the local point person and/or collaborative leaders to discuss community progress and to update the community on Discovery related matters.</p> <p>Participate in monthly conference calls with the capacity building broker and Senior Program Officer for the purposes of coordinating resources and implementation tasks</p> <p>Attend skill enhancement sessions on</p>	<p>Allocate an average of 5 hours per week per community. Not to exceed 20 hours per month per community.</p> <p>Visit assigned communities. Visits include observing collaborative meetings, committee meetings or community events. The frequency of visits will be based on community need, technical assistance strategy and resource availability.</p> <p>Have monthly phone contact with the local point person and/or collaborative leaders to discuss community progress and to update the community on Discovery related matters.</p> <p>Participate in monthly conference calls with the capacity building broker and Senior Program Officer for the purposes of coordinating resources and implementation</p>	<p>Allocate from 2 to 10 hours per month per community, with an average of up to 7.5 hours per community per month</p>

	2002	2006	2008
	<p>topics, which may include parent engagement, communication/ message development, and collaboration</p> <p>Jointly with the Senior Program Officer and capacity building broker identify content and timeline of skill enhancement sessions</p> <p>Attend bimonthly meetings of the GMF Integration Team and all capacity building seminars and activities</p> <p>Submit monthly reports...to the Senior Program Officer</p> <p>Complete a six-month interim report and a final report</p> <p>Meet with the GMF Integration Team on bi-monthly basis to discuss implementation issues, along with the capacity building broker, knowledge development facilitator, and public will consultant</p> <p>Participate in documentation activities and the Discovery learning community</p> <p>Participate in learning opportunities in Public Will Building</p> <p>Identify emerging public will opportunities within communities</p> <p>Consult on the development of GMF's</p>	<p>tasks</p> <p>Attend skill enhancement sessions on topics, which may include parent engagement, communication/ message development, and collaboration</p> <p>Jointly with the Senior Program Officer and capacity building broker identify content and timeline of skill enhancement sessions</p> <p>Facilitating community planning and assessment meetings.</p> <p>Facilitate regional learning circles.</p> <p>Providing feedback to the community on progress and challenges</p> <p>Submit monthly reports...to the Senior Program Officer</p> <p>Complete a six-month interim report and a final report</p> <p>Meet with the GMF Integration Team on bi-monthly basis to discuss implementation issues, along with the capacity building broker, knowledge development facilitator, and public will consultant</p> <p>Participate in documentation</p>	

	2002	2006	2008
	public will agenda	<p>activities and the Discovery learning community</p> <p>Participate in learning opportunities in Public Will Building</p> <p>Identify emerging public will opportunities within communities</p> <p>Consult on the development of GMF's public will agenda</p> <p>Attending all capacity building seminars and activities</p> <p>Submitting periodic community progress reports to GMF</p> <p>Participating in documentation activities and the Discovery learning community</p>	
<b>Boundaries</b>	<p>Guidelines for Community Liaisons:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Don't be an advocate for the community to GMF. Rather, be part of learning together with GMF.</li> <li>• Don't represent administrative decisions of GMF to the community.</li> </ul>		<p>Liaisons may provide limited information to consultants (to the planning communities) seeking to be hired. If requested by community, liaisons may assist the hired consultant with background and context on the history of a community's efforts, as well as current relationships and dynamics. All communication with facilitation consultants is to be guided by the fact that the consultant's client is</p>

	2002	2006	2008
			<p>the community.</p> <p>Due to the liaisons' relationship to GMF, the liaisons cannot assist in preparing the grant proposal (for planning grants). Consultants that can assist have been identified.</p> <p>If there is a conflict between the CMT (community management teams in the joint State/Memorial Fund planning grants) and the community, the liaison should refer the community to the CMT. This is comparable to the issues between GMF and the community.</p> <p>As with regional efforts funded in the past, GMF's expectation is that the demand on liaison's engagement and consultation will be managed within the allotted time frame for their communities.</p> <p>The liaison role is broadly defined to allow a liaison to be flexible in the support provided to a community.</p> <p>As with all liaison activity in communities, participation in [community] planning activities will be determined in consultation</p>

	2002	2006	2008
			<p>with the Discovery coordinator and other collaborative leaders and members.</p> <p>If asked, the liaison can help the ... group think through their needs, articulate a scope of services, use The Insider's Guide to Outside Advice Toolkit. The liaison can support the [group] to make a well-informed decision but should not recommend a specific consultant.</p>

**APPENDIX B:**  
**DATA SOURCES AND METHODS**

The information used in preparing this paper was gathered over several years, drawing upon observations, written materials, and interviews with the liaisons, with community representatives, and with Memorial Fund staff. During the period of time when most observations and interviews were conducted (between 2005 and 2009), a total of 7 individuals served as liaisons, with one leaving and another coming on in 2008.

Specific sources of information include:

- Observations at and Notes from Liaison Meetings, 2005 through 2009
- Observations at and Notes from Liaison Retreats, 2006 through 2009
- Interviews with Liaisons Conducted by Evaluator, November 2005, March 2007, Spring 2008, Spring/Summer 2009
- Interviews with Community Coordinators and Other Members of Collaborative Groups, Summer 2007
- Rating of Value of Liaison Activities on Form in Community Applications, submitted in February 2007 and referring to activities during 2006
- Interview with GMF Program Officer, August 2008 and December 2009

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