T A P

Learning Through Networks

The story of a remarkable collaborative process and its implications for the future of organizational and community capacity building

St. Luke's Health Initiatives

SLHI

chance
favors the
connected
mind.

TAP | St. Luke's Health Initiatives

This is the story of TAP, a nonprofit organizational and community capacity building program that began as a "flyer" in 1997 and developed into Arizona's premier collaborative capacity building network and a model for the rest of the nation.

We are telling this story at the request of funders and community organizations that have become acquainted with TAP over its 14-year history. They suggested it might hold lessons for others interested in how to improve nonprofit organizational and community capacity building through collaborative efforts.

Just as important, we are telling the TAP story as a heuristic exercise. By unraveling the threads of the program's successes and challenges, we bring into sharp relief the central tensions that SLHI and others working in the arena of social change continue to struggle with:

- The tension between the need for control and the need for self-organization and flexibility.

- The tension between accountability at the organizational level and accountability across networks.

- The tension between strategy, execution and culture.

- The tension between ownership, commitment and involvement.

Finally, we are telling the TAP story to tie together lessons learned from the past eight years of promoting asset-based approaches to organizational and community building – what we call *Health in a New Key* – with our work in informing and framing the broader policy discussion around health care and community health.

No matter where the story starts, this is where it ends: The future will belong to the integrators, the networkers and the collaborators.

Chance favors the connected mind.

"I now have the 30-second elevator speech. The TAP sessions taught us how to succinctly and powerfully say what we do while incorporating a story in 30 to 60 seconds." TAP Participant

Where something comes from is less

Method

SLHI has evaluated TAP annually for the past 14 years. For the first several years these evaluations were conducted by the consultants overseeing the program and consisted primarily of compiling the metrics (number of organizations, teams formed, topics covered) and feedback from the participants. When TAP moved from a traditional "grant" model to an in-house managerial and "contractor" approach, we engaged an independent evaluator and developed a more formal "logic model" for assessing the work, including a review of the results of various program components over time. These evaluations have been compiled for interpretation here.

For this report specifically, we conducted focus group research of past TAP participants and consultants. Over 200 nonprofit consultants participate in the *Health in a New Key* Consultants Community of Practice (www.slhinet.org), which provides SLHI with a rich network of reflection and learning to inform both our own work in community building and the work of other organizations in Arizona. Additionally, we conducted 10 in-depth interviews with persons whose knowledge of, and experience in, nonprofit capacity building we have come to respect and draw on over the years.

We also reviewed and analyzed current literature on the history, experience and trends in organizational and community capacity building broadly considered. This provides an interpretative framework in which to assess and refresh our efforts to improve the health of people and communities in Arizona.

WHAT IS TAP?

The short answer is this: TAP – *Technical Assistance Partnership* – is a complimentary program where teams of nonprofit organizations and community coalitions commit to working together in a self-initiated, self-selecting and self-sustaining process to identify and implement solutions for common organizational, technical and community development issues. Teams are matched with consultants who help them collaboratively work through the challenges and opportunities.

This is hardly the whole story, however. For example, some of us prefer to think of TAP in terms of *Tools, Assets and Partnerships* instead of "technical assistance," which captures neither the spirit and culture of TAP nor the breadth and depth of what occurs in the TAP process.

Further, while the teams are primarily composed of nonprofits, for-profit businesses and government agencies may participate in one of the coalitions. You can't address community capacity building issues in the nonprofit sector alone. You have to "tap" into everyone's assets.

For that reason, TAP is better described as a *learning network* than as a *program*. The problem is, we are so vested in the language of programs, nonprofit organizations, technical assistance and professional consultants that we often lose sight of the centrality of networks in making change of any significance.

Truth be told, TAP has moved way beyond an acronym. TAP is TAP. It has fashioned its own unique identity in the cauldron of community experience.

It is a story worth telling.

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important than where it goes.

A Short History of TAP

TAP began with a bit of serendipitous timing.

In 1996, when SLHI was in the process of setting up its administrative and managerial infrastructure, its CEO attended a workshop offered by a local CPA firm on issues to consider in selecting nonprofit accounting software. He found himself in a room of almost 100 people from small- and mid-sized nonprofit organizations who, like himself, had paid a sizeable registration fee to get some "technical assistance" in accounting. In talking with other workshop participants, he learned that even though the registration fee was a stretch for some of them, there wasn't any place else to go for this type of assistance.

Several months later, Joyce Winston and Maryn Boess, two respected nonprofit consultants with years of experience in such areas as strategic planning, board development and fund raising, came to SLHI with an observation and a request: They, too, ran into many small- and mid-sized nonprofits that needed all manner of assistance in increasing their organizational capacity and effectiveness. Often they couldn't afford to pay consultants, and there were few other places in the community where they could turn.

Would SLHI be interested in funding a pilot project to test a solution to this problem? They had in mind to bring nonprofits together in small teams – *learning circles* – that would self-select by area of interest (fund raising, volunteer management, advocacy, board development, etc.). Then they would match up each team with a consultant who had expertise in the area, and they would *get better together.*

Collaborative capacity building through learning circles. Would it actually work? It was worth a small $25,000 grant to the Arizona State University Nonprofit Management Institute – the fiscal agent for the project – to find out.

Lessons from the Pilot Project

In the six-month pilot project, 12 team proposals were accepted for funding, representing 53 different agencies. The areas of collaboration were diverse – a group of behavioral health agencies seeking to develop a shared management information system to compete in a managed care environment, a group of agencies seeking to improve marketing strategies for adoption services, another group of organizations seeking assistance in developing plans for sustainable funding, among others. Not every team finished – two lost momentum and dropped out, and two others were combined with other teams to focus on common issues. At the end, participants gave the project high marks, and plans were made to "tweak" the process and offer it again the following year.

Key lessons emerged from the pilot project that still resonate 14 years later:

- In the introductory community meetings announcing the project, participants were so enthusiastic that they began to exchange information and form teams right on the spot. The lead consultants recognized a clear need to provide more opportunity for potential participants to simply *get together*, mingle, share ideas, resources, contacts and knowledge. This produces a huge upside, regardless of whether groups are actually "funded" as a TAP team or not.

- Not everyone starts from the same place. Some team members were savvy and experienced, others were not. This can create friction in the group and present a problem for the consultant in terms of facilitation and finding the right level of knowledge and skill development.

- The key factor is matching the right consultant with the team. Not all consultants do well in a "peer learning" environment. Some thrive in a one-on-one client environment; others view themselves more as coaches and facilitators, and prefer to "draw out" the learning from the group itself. Matching consultants with teams is an art, not a science.

- TAP requires a focused commitment of time and effort from participants. If team members don't participate equally in the group process, peer learning is degraded. TAP has developed a culture of commitment over time that depends on everyone being upfront about personal commitment, and having clear goals and high expectations. In the pilot project, the TAP model didn't work for those who weren't willing to make the commitment. That remains the case today.

- The founders of TAP quickly discovered the fine art of combining structure with flexibility to adapt to changing circumstances. A few teams "fell apart" because they didn't have a clear sense of their priorities and needed help in simply clarifying the issues that had brought them together in the first place. The consultants had to regroup, change the game plan with some teams, combine others and generally "make things up" as they went along. Some projects – and people – required a high degree of structure and maintenance, others less so. We continue to wrestle with the tension between structure and flexibility today.

In the early years between 1997-2000, TAP "chugged along" as a team-based capacity building program that attracted approximately 100-120 persons to one "*TAP Talk*" and spread 50-55 organizations across 8-10 teams for 12 hours of collaborative work through consultant-led sessions. Because of logistical issues that arose from outsourcing the program to a separate fiscal agent organization and treating it as a traditional grant (primarily delays in getting facilities and people paid in a timely fashion), SLHI decided to bring TAP in-house at the beginning of 2001, serve as its own fiscal agent, contract with Joyce Winston, one of the founding consultants, to manage the program, and provide staff administrative support.

This decision coincided with moving SLHI offices to a larger facility and opening up its meeting space to community groups. TAP teams began to gather at SLHI's offices, which further integrated the program within the foundation.

The following year TAP moved to two annual *TAP Talks* and program cycles instead of one, without seeing any significant change in either the number of participating organizations or teams. The big change occurred in 2005 when SLHI essentially doubled the program budget, moved from two annual program cycles to three, and doubled the number of participating organizations and teams.

The Tipping Point

In retrospect, the significant increase in growth and impact was due to the confluence of several important factors during the "tipping point" period of 2004-2006:

- SLHI made the conscious decision to more aggressively market TAP in the broader community. This, coupled with its growing word-of-mouth reputation in the nonprofit sector, attracted more attention and interest.

- In 2003-2004, SLHI issued its *Resilience: Health in a New Key* report, which proved to be catalytic in recasting our entire portfolio of work from a deficit-based to a strength-based approach. SLHI launched its *Health in a New Key* community building work with a special tenth anniversary grant of $1 million in 2005 to nine community partnership projects that modeled the collaborative, team-based approach already well grounded in TAP.

- As a result of thinking more strategically about how to promote strength-based community building, SLHI began to encourage the formation of community coalitions through TAP in addition to more traditional organizational capacity building. This spilled over to *Health in a New Key* community grants, which included a growing number of faith-based partners, among others.

- In 2005-2006, SLHI began to actively promote the communities of practice (CoPs) approach to collaborative, peer learning through its SLHINet.org infrastructure. A number of TAP consultants who were committed to strength-based approaches in their own work formed a *Health in a New Key* Consultants Community of Practice, which eventually expanded to include over 200 members. This energy and peer learning in the consultant community fed right back into the TAP network.
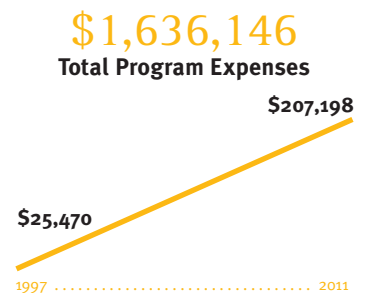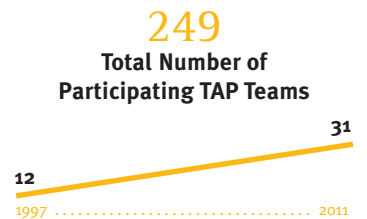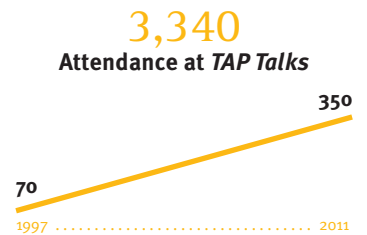
TAP by the Numbers
1997-2011

TAP by the numbers can be misleading. People may attend more than one *TAP Talk* or participate on more than one TAP team. Many organizations look forward to participating in TAP on an annual basis. One person believes she has been involved in TAP 11 times – a TAP addict!

Nevertheless, over half of *TAP Talk* participants are new to the program every year. The following numbers are in the aggregate and document the growth and scope of TAP today.

TAP Distribution of Expenses

10%
TAP Talks

48%
Program Teams

32%
Program Management*

5%
Miscellaneous

5%
Evaluation
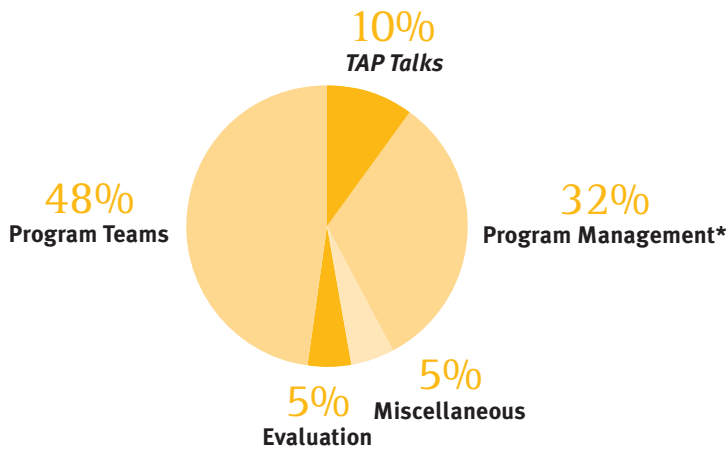
* *Program management covers not only hands-on program oversight, management and administration, but also the careful matching of consultants with teams, assisting team formation and reassignment as appropriate, and managing the HNK Consultants Community of Practice, which has proven instrumental to TAP's success.*

3,340
Attendance at *TAP Talks*

70 — 350
1997 2011

249
Total Number of Participating TAP Teams

12 — 31
1997 2011

1,452
Total Number of Participating Organizations

53 — 210
1997 2011

$1,636,146
Total Program Expenses

$25,470 — $207,198
1997 2011

"Just looking at TAP's numbers, if we weren't successful, it would have gone the other way."

Bonnie Wright, TAP Director

TAP Today

TAP today is offered in three cycles: February, June and October. This is how it works:

TAP Talks

Each cycle begins with a *TAP Talk* – a workshop that runs from 9 a.m. to 2 p.m. and attracts 100-130 participants, or approximately 350 persons annually.

- During the morning portion of the *TAP Talk*, there is a presentation and skill-building workshop on a topic of interest (recent examples include the revised 990 federal tax forms and how to more effectively use social media, among others). The topic is selected by the TAP Director and SLHI after feedback from the consultant community and TAP participants. Presenters might include national/regional figures, local consultants and panels, depending on the "fit" with the topic and desired outcomes.

- Following lunch and networking, the TAP Director presents an overview of TAP and what to expect. Past participants are invited to share their experiences with new attendees to provide context and continuity. Participants then break into self-selected groups according to area of interest, most of which are pre-arranged by perennial topics of interest: communications, fund development, advocacy, board development, etc. It is not uncommon for new issues to arise, and participants are encouraged to form their own "tables" and see who shows up. Veteran TAP consultants are often in attendance and may sit with one of the break-out groups to offer support and advice. The TAP Director and SLHI staff "float" among the groups, respond to questions and connect people with similar interests.

Application and Matching Process

- An online registration process (www.tapaz.org) is completed approximately one month following the *TAP Talk*. All participants are required to complete an individual profile, and a designated person registers as the contact person for the team.

- The TAP Director monitors the team application process and makes adjustments and recommendations as appropriate. Experience has shown that a minimum of five persons is generally required for a successful team, and at least three different agencies. The optimum size is 4-5 agencies and 8-10 people; the community alliance teams may be larger. Some groups may be combined, delayed or otherwise modified, depending on circumstances.

- The TAP Director matches selected teams with a consultant whose expertise and experience is the "best fit" with the interests and characteristics of the team. This might be a consultant with deep content knowledge, someone skilled in group facilitation and conflict resolution, a "coach" skilled at drawing out the wisdom and experience of the group, etc. The success of the matching process depends on the Director's knowledge of the consultants themselves, which is greatly enhanced by participation in the *Health in a New Key* Consultants Community of Practice (*HNK* CoP).

TAP Sessions

- Teams meet with their consultants for a total of 12 hours over a six- to eight-week period. Generally this breaks out into six two-hour sessions, although it could be four three-hour sessions, etc. Teams and consultants decide on their own meeting schedule and place, depending on their schedules and needs.

- The TAP Director attends the first meeting of each team to go over the process and what is expected at the end. Personal attendance and active participation are expected, and each team has a specific goal and anticipated outcome.

- Not everything works out as planned. Some teams flourish and accomplish their goals; a few disband, some discover they were unclear about what they wanted to accomplish in the first place, etc. TAP, however, is adaptable: The Director monitors the sessions as they proceed and recommends adjustments to both team members and the consultants as appropriate. The general rule is not to waste anybody's time.

Evaluation

- Each team fills out an online evaluation at the end of the process. Each consultant also fills out an evaluation. Finally, each team member is asked to fill out an evaluation one year later to determine what, if anything, has changed as a result of participating in TAP. An independent evaluator compiles this material, along with personal interviews. Results are analyzed and shared on an annual basis.

THE TAP DIRECTOR

The role of the TAP Director is critical to the success of the model. SLHI has been fortunate to contract with just two TAP Directors since it brought the program in-house in 2001. This has provided a measure of continuity and time for the director to develop strong relationships with the consultant community. The current director, Bonnie Wright (former CEO of the Red Cross in Arizona), believes there are four characteristics necessary to be an effective TAP leader:

1. A commitment to the basic values and goals of peer learning.

2. Being flexible and seeing the opportunities.

3. Boundary management – holding the space, but still allowing space for self-discovery and management.

4. Not being afraid of being in charge.

TAP Logic Model

The TAP Logic Model emerged from the ongoing implementation of TAP in the community, and not vice versa. Some people put a lot of stock in logic models and theories of change, but we have found that clarity emerges from practice, not practice from clarity. Whether TAP tomorrow will resemble TAP today is anybody's guess. A logic model is useful only insofar as it serves to generate a collective discussion of ends and means in the light of changing circumstances.

SITUATION

- Small- to mid-sized nonprofit organizations and community coalitions have strengths and assets they can leverage to help meet their goals

PRIORITIES

- Maximize investment by using a collaborative method of capacity building

WHAT WE INVEST

- Organization and community strengths and assets
- Speakers
- Skill workshops and networking luncheons
- Consultants
- Space

WHAT WE DO

- Provide a workshop three times per year at which nonprofits can network and find others with similar capacity building interests
- Provide 3 capacity building grant cycles
- Provide a minimum of 12 hours of consulting
- Provide follow-up support as appropriate

WHO WE REACH

- Nonprofits, their staff and volunteers
- Community coalitions

WHAT THE SHORT TERM RESULTS ARE

LEARNING:

- Participants acquire specific knowledge and skills to increase organizational and community capacity and confidence
- Participants broaden their community connections

WHAT THE MEDIUM TERM RESULTS ARE

ACTION:

- Participants translate learning into plans and activities at their agencies and in their communities

WHAT THE LONG TERM RESULTS ARE

CONDITIONS:

- Agency capacity and performance are improved; community resiliency is improved with healthy agencies
- Community conditions improve through the actions of successful coalitions

Clarity emerges from practice.

What Do Participants Think of TAP?

TAP participants are surveyed following completion of the program and then again one year later to determine what, if anything, has changed in their organization and/or community as a result of their participation. An independent evaluator also conducts personal interviews with a sampling of participants to gather stories and probe some of the issues raised by both participants and consultants.

Data presented here combine surveys between 2008-2010, during which 49 TAP teams were formed. Response rates were 50 percent for the first survey and 40 percent for the follow-up survey. Low response rates over the past two years have been a concern and are being addressed through a more rigorous reminder schedule and setting clear expectations of what is required of participants at the outset.

"Participating in TAP not only changed my mind, it changed my attitude. That was the most important thing."

TAP Participant

SATISFACTION WITH TAP TEAM

How satisfied are you with...	Very Satisfied	Satisfied	Dissatisfied	Very Dissatisfied	N/A or Unsure
The TAP process of peer learning and group facilitation.	77%	22%			1%
The amount of time involved for the results achieved.	64%	34%	1%		1%
The benefits to your organization from participation in TAP.	70%	25%	1%		4%
The overall quality of the work performed through your group.	67%	30%	1%		2%

PERCEIVED BENEFITS

Question...	Yes	No	N/A for This Group
Did you acquire specific knowledge and skills?	95%	3%	2%
Did you gain confidence in your ability to achieve your objectives?	92%	2%	6%
Will you be able to translate what you have done with your TAP Team into work at your organization?	94%	1%	5%

SATISFACTION WITH FACILITATOR

How satisfied were you with the facilitator's...	Very Satisfied	Satisfied	Dissatisfied	Very Dissatisfied	N/A or Unsure
Communication skills	80%	18%	2%		1%
Knowledge and expertise	84%	14%	1%		1%
Understanding of your organization's needs	70%	25%	3%		2%
Creativity and flexibility	75%	22%	1%		2%
Responsiveness/follow through	84%	13%			3%

One Year Later

In a follow-up survey to participants one year later, *90 percent* said they had seen improvements in their organization and/or community as a result of putting the knowledge and skills gained through TAP into practice. Some of the more commonly mentioned changes included:

- ✓ Improved fund raising (including planned giving), special events, major grants and greater board involvement.

- ✓ Improved board organization, functioning and involvement.

- ✓ New and strengthened community partnerships.

- ✓ More effective use and management of volunteers.

- ✓ Improved external communication, including more effective use of social media and media relations.

- ✓ Implementation of new programs (multiple community gardens and one major inner-city program targeting behavioral health issues among people of color, among others).

When asked what contributed to their success in building capacity within the organization and community, participants mentioned factors internal to TAP, such as increased awareness, knowledge and skills gained, peer learning, the expertise of the consultant/facilitator, and applying the tools and samples provided by the facilitator and other team members.

Participants also noted other factors critical to their success, such as strong support of the board and CEO, funding partners and new strengthened community relationships.

ALL WAS NOT ROSES

All was not roses, however. Participants mentioned the constant impediments of a difficult economy, board issues, personnel issues, liability issues and the constant search for resources and lack of time. Compared to TAP participant feedback in previous years, there was a palpable difference in mood, financial and staffing pressures, and even personal involvement during the 2008-2010 recession and budget crisis in Arizona. In some of the TAP teams, there was a much higher drop-out rate than usual. Based on feedback, the pressure-cooker environment took a major psychological and even physical toll on some participants who felt they had neither the time nor energy to complete work with the team.

In the Participants' Own Words

In the focus groups and interviews, participants generally had positive things to say about the TAP experience:

"TAP gets the juices going in a very nonthreatening environment. That's its biggest thing."

"One of the strengths of TAP is that you're sitting with other people who are smaller organizations like you, and you're feeding off each other, the energy, off the knowledge. It's incredible. I have taken nonprofit development courses and paid good money for them, and I just haven't got from them what I get from these TAP groups."

"One of the biggest strengths in TAP is that when you share ideas, you're actually making the pie bigger. I'm not giving you a piece of my pie and taking away from me, but it's this genuine outgoingness, this willingness to share ideas that makes the pie bigger for everyone."

"When I started [name of organization], for the first three years I was grinding it out, growing the business, and I realized I was pretty lonely. I missed colleagues, I missed peers. I was ravenous for that. Isolation can be a big problem in our sector. Organizations like ONE (Organization of Nonprofit Executives) are good for that, so is TAP, but we need more opportunities to network and learn from peers."

Some participants felt that the consultants should play a more active role:

"I would have liked to have gotten more how-to information from the consultant. They are the experts, after all."

"Being able to learn from each other is amazing, and that's really remarkable about TAP, but sometimes we're [the team members] not the ones who have the information, and we don't always know the questions to ask, so it would be nice for the consultant with the knowledge to help spur the conversation. Some of them are good at this, but some of them are not."

Others noted issues with group dynamics and different levels of skills among team members:

"I keep in contact with lots of people from past TAP groups. We do letters of support for grants, different collaborations, all sorts of things. But you know, some groups have gelled well, and some haven't. In some groups we all hit it off, and it works well, and in other groups it's dysfunctional."

"In one group I was in on fund raising, you had some people who were chief development officers with lots of experience and others who were just getting into that role. It was hard for the consultant to try to ratchet everyone up to a certain point when people were all over the place."

"Part of the strength of TAP is that you meet people you probably wouldn't meet otherwise, and when you get connected with enough people, it's amazing how many of them are willing to help you. It's not just the day-to-day stuff, but new ideas, too."

TAP Participant

"As a result of TAP, we now have a community garden that is up and running smoothly." TAP Participant

Many participants had specific success stories to share:

"We successfully formed and launched our [name of program] and received a $400k per year grant from [name of organization] to serve the needs of predominantly diverse inner-city minority populations in a cultural competent manner."

"Our board has become more organized and focused on treating our organization with the same mindset that a for-profit business needs. We have become more unified."

"I learned how to prioritize the initiatives and tasks on my list. I learned better how to delegate duties and responsibilities. I now know much more about how to resolve conflict and mission-critical issues. There are fewer fires to put out these days."

A TAP TALE

Helping Hands for Single Moms

Chris Coffman, founder and executive director of *Helping Hands for Single Moms*, began his relationship with TAP when his organization was brand new, and, in his words, "I didn't have a clue how to run a nonprofit." Over the last ten years Chris participated in several TAP teams. The first and most memorable was with consultant Vicki Scarafiotti. He learned about business planning, creating an "elevator" message about *Helping Hands for Single Moms*, presenting his organization to funders, and legal filing requirements.

As *Helping Hands for Single Moms* grew, he participated in other teams. Today it is a thriving organization with an annual budget over $350,000. He is sure that *Helping Hands for Single Moms* would not be where it is today had he not had the support of TAP. He identifies two unique characteristics of TAP: the great dynamics between and among the participants and the consultant, and how the topical teams both reinforce and complement each other.

What Do Consultants Think of TAP?

TAP consultants all approach the work differently. They represent a diversity of backgrounds and interests, and it is not surprising that they express a diversity of views about the strengths and challenges of the collaborative approach to organizational and community capacity building. Later in this report we take up the subject of the roles and approaches consultants might play in an increasingly complex and networked environment. Here we provide direct responses from consultants themselves in focus groups and in their submitted evaluations of TAP teams with which they were matched.

Generally, the TAP consultants are as positive about the TAP approach as the participants:

> *"I work mostly with the TAP alliance groups, like groups that want to form an oral health coalition or peer and family service groups for people with mental illness who have ideas on how to improve the system. The critical piece of what makes these TAP groups so effective is that the people manage to work through whatever territorialism or turf battles that exist, even when the groups have similar missions and goals. People have been willing to get out of the defensive or judgmental kind of mindset. It's some of the most fulfilling work I do."*

WHAT IS A CONSULTANT?

Traditionally, a consultant is someone who provides professional or expert advice in a particular area such as management, technology, marketing and development. Working as individual contractors or as part of a consulting firm, they are usually an expert or professional in the field and have a wide range of knowledge and experience in the subject matter.

TAP is built on a team-based approach with an emphasis on peer learning, so the role of the consultant can vary. In some instances, the "consultant-as-dispenser-of-expert-advice" role is appropriate and expected by team members, especially in areas where participants need basic information and training in how to approach a specific goal: select a technology system, create an accounting system, prepare an effective grant proposal, etc. Here, the *consultant* is the source of the content.

In other teams, the consultant's role is to *coach* participants in developing the content themselves by providing learning materials and exercises where they work collaboratively to produce their own marketing plans, web site, board development plans and so on. Consultants who are skilled at working as coaches believe the greatest return on investment is helping others to become more self-directed and successful.

In the TAP alliance teams, the role of the consultant is most often that of *facilitator*: Managing the group dialogue on deciding what results they want to achieve together, how they want to achieve them, and then achieving them. Highly skilled facilitators foster open dialogue that leads to maximum participation and trust.

Consult, facilitate or coach? Each TAP team is different, and so are the consultants. Facilitation skills are essential in a team environment. So is content knowledge in those cases where it is the focus of attention. Successful coaching – getting people to "own" the process and product and literally change the way they think – is perhaps the most transforming work of all.

"Most of what I do [in fund development] is fairly structured, with a sequence of modules, where everyone participates and has homework assignments and shares with each other. Not everyone contributes, and a few may drop out, but by and large it's worked well. I've gotten some referral work from it."

"There is a greater opportunity and probably more openness and willingness among nonprofits to collaborate, as distinct from the more competitive environment of the for-profit business community, where I also do work. You see it in these TAP groups." TAP Consultant

"I found out that the work I did with [name of community coalition] led to a $150,000 community development project grant, and that the fund raising materials developed by [name of organization] through the team increased their fund raising the following year by 50 percent. I guess that's why TAP has been around for so long."

"What I'm seeing in some of the TAP groups is that organizations dealing with a particular issue are coming together and talking about how they can collaborate to have more collective impact on the issue. I'll just use the youth aging out of foster care issue as one example. It's been around for decades, and it's not going away. Homelessness. It's been around for centuries. What impact are we making there? We're not going to really make an impact on these issues unless people come to the table and are forced to interact."

Not everything goes smoothly, however:

"In one alliance group I worked with, it turned out that the person who was leading the effort didn't have the capacity to be in that role, and everyone else began to realize it, and they didn't seem to have the capacity or time as well, so the whole thing sort of fizzled by the wayside."

"Occasionally I run into people in TAP who are into what amounts to be career exploring. They don't necessarily fit with those who are staff members or volunteers, and they seem to be interested in being consultants themselves. They got into TAP, and I'm not sure how that happened."

Others have a different take on these "career explorers:"

"I probably have some of those people, but to their credit they are looking to make a change and have an impact. I see a lot of people coming from the for-profit sector, and maybe they are older and have great skills, and we just want to put them into this neat little 'nonprofit' box, and I struggle with that. Maybe we ought to have a TAP group for these people, because I think they are going to be needed."

Some consultants think TAP is too loose and should be tightened up:

"In my work with TAP, I'm finding that some of the nonprofits are missing a step. What they need is basic business planning 101 before they jump into development planning or whatever. Some of them come to TAP all excited about doing great things, but then they realize wow, this is more complex and challenging than I thought, and I don't have the basics. So some of them drop out."

"One thing we might do to strengthen TAP would be to have different tracks, one track for whether you should be a nonprofit organization in the first place, another for basic business planning 101, another for more specific areas like fund development, that sort of thing."

"Personally, I do not believe that anyone should be allowed to participate in TAP who doesn't have a 501(c)(3). There should be a separate program for those people who don't have a clue what they are doing. I'm a firm believer that just because you have a hangnail is not a reason to start a nonprofit."

"People do not know how to distinguish between a strategic plan and a business plan. They don't know all the pieces, so a lot of the stuff just passes over them."

"I think we need to have some kind of quality check around using consultants in TAP who understand and practice the strength-based approach. It's like that quote from Martin Luther King to the effect that if you don't understand the 'why' of what you're doing, you cannot understand the 'what.'"

> *"I think we need to have some kind of quality check around using consultants in TAP who understand and practice the strength-based approach."*
>
> TAP Consultant

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"We have to remember that learning
what doesn't work is often as important
or more important than what does.
We've found that alliances can't always
get to where they wanted to go,
and it took getting together as a TAP team
to find that out." TAP Consultant

On the other hand:

> *"Personally, I resist too much structure in TAP. That's one of its strengths. It's open and free-flowing."*

Consultants had different views on the focus of TAP, and whether it's right for everybody, participants and consultants alike:

> *"TAP should be kept pure. If you don't have the basic technical assistance in the fundamentals, it's hard to get to the next phase."*

> *"It's not an either-or situation. There is a need for both in TAP: skill building, the basics that TAP has traditionally offered, as well as bringing people together to develop alliances of like interests."*

> *"Sometimes people are looking for specific issue consulting and execution, and that is not always possible to deliver in a group environment."*

> *"Lack of knowledge in the area of new technology among some consultants has been an issue in some groups. Participants aren't the only ones who need to get up to speed."*

The Health in a New Key
Consultants Community of Practice

Ever since release of the publication, *Resilience: Health in a New Key*, SLHI has sought to instill the principles and practices of strength-based community development throughout Arizona. In 2006 a group of TAP consultants who were interested in applying these principles in their own work formed the *Health in a New Key* Consultants Community of Practice, which has grown to an active network of over 200 consultants. The TAP Director is also the moderator of the *HNK* CoP, which further integrates learning and practice in the wider community. The consultants develop and run their own programs, maintain an active presence on SLHINet, meet in person monthly, and hold a well-attended annual conference. Based on both formal and informal surveys and evaluations, as well as simply observing changes in the wider community, there have been a number of tangible benefits from the *HNK* CoP:

For *HNK* CoP members

- ✓ A better understanding of a strength-based approach
- ✓ Increased confidence and validation
- ✓ Referrals leading to new work
- ✓ Better understanding in the community of the role and value of consultants
- ✓ Peer support and camaraderie in difficult times
- ✓ More collaborative projects and learning opportunities

For agencies and communities

- ✓ A shift from a deficit-based to an asset-based approach
- ✓ Better understanding of how to work with and select consultants
- ✓ Greater confidence to establish peer-run programs
- ✓ Increased funder understanding of strength-based approaches in community development
- ✓ Improved ability to identify and leverage assets in the community

For SLHI

- ✓ An expanded pool of consultants, not only for TAP, but also for other programs and organizations
- ✓ An opportunity to learn more about how CoPs work and develop
- ✓ Increased strategic capabilities and support for developing community networks
- ✓ A source of identifying and nurturing talent, new ideas and innovation

AN OUTSIDER'S PERSPECTIVE

"Last week, I had the privilege of working with many of the facilitators who have participated in the St. Luke's Health Initiatives consulting community (*HNK* CoP). As a consultant for *BoardSource*, I work with many consultants, facilitators and nonprofits across the country. I was incredibly impressed with the caliber of the participants who are involved with your program. The camaraderie that is shared among the group is inspiring and not often demonstrated by facilitators and consultants in the same area. The culture of sharing and continuous improvement can only serve to assist the community. Within the course of the two days that I spent with the group – not all of whom were participants in the community of practice – it became apparent who was involved with the SLHI program and who was not. The investment you have made into the community is evident and inspiring for someone like me to observe!"

Susan Decker, *Senior Governance Consultant, BoardSource*

Infant Toddler Mental Health Coalition of Arizona Endorsement

TAP consultant and director, Bonnie Wright, facilitated three business planning sessions and a planning retreat with members of the Infant Toddler Mental Health Coalition of Arizona in preparation for submitting a grant proposal to the Lodestar Foundation. Lodestar funded the Coalition for three years to get a new Infant Mental Health Endorsement (IMHE) established in Arizona.

Without the business planning sessions, the Coalition would not have secured the funding to purchase the license and hire a part-time coordinator to initiate the endorsement system. Endorsement recognizes professionals and practitioners with education and expertise in providing high quality care and services to infants, toddlers, and their families. More than 60 practitioners have already been endorsed, and many more are working toward recognition of this specialized expertise.

The Arizona Coalition is helping to coordinate other states' activities around Infant Mental Health Endorsement through a community of practice (CoP) hosted by slhiNet.org. Starting with five states in 2008, there are now representatives from 15 states who are registered in the IMHE Community. Members share ideas, policy and procedure documents, and educational presentations in the library while even more emails fly around the country and keep members of the community up-to-date and engaged in interstate assistance.

TAP Saved Me

"In early 2010 it was apparent to me that Crossroads, the organization I head, needed to expand. We are in the business of helping men and women who are afflicted with substance abuse issues, and our programs were all running above capacity. For me, expansion was a 'no-brainer.' All I needed to do was identify a facility we could occupy, inform our board of directors, and we would move forward.

"I still remember our board meeting where we made the presentation to expand. I had it all planned out in my mind how it would go...until our board unanimously voted my expansion plan down. Not only that, they also let me know that they thought we needed to drastically reduce expenses and cut payroll by 20%! In a short period of time, I had gone from sure growth to the need to downsize.

"I wish I could tell you that I handled this well, but I didn't. I became passive-aggressive with my board president and other board members. To say I was distraught would be a classic understatement.

"That is when I asked Jane Pearson at SLHI for help. Here is the note she wrote back to me:

> *Don't be too hard on yourself. Things like this happen. I would suggest that the TAP Executive Director Roundtable might be a great resource for you. The next time to sign up will be at the June 16 TAP Talk. Go to our web site and sign up to attend. I think you will find it a good experience.*

"TAP and the Executive Director's Roundtable turned it all around for me. I learned how to work better with my board. I learned how other EDs handle problems. I learned a lot of things. It was and is a life-changing experience.

"A year later, and we are opening that new facility this week! I get along with my board president, and we communicate almost every day. I still have a lot to learn, so I remain in the TAP ED Roundtable. I am so grateful to have this wonderful tool that has made all the difference!"

Lee Pioske, *Executive Director, The Crossroads*

SLHI seeks to instill the principles and practices of strength-based community development throughout Arizona.

TO BE OR NOT TO BE

Several years ago SLHI received a grant to initiate a "Latino TAP" to provide capacity building assistance for Latino-led organizations. We discovered that while Latinos were actively involved in local efforts to build healthy communities, many of them were not associated with a formal 501(c)(3) organization and needed more exposure to basic organizational structure for TAP to be useful. This – coupled with a relatively high "churn" rate for small, emerging nonprofits and the number of people in TAP who were at the "thinking stage" of their nonprofit development – led to the TAP *To Be or Not to Be* modules.

The *To Be or Not to Be* sessions explore what it means to be a 501(c)(3) and alternative ways of implementing a mission, such as finding an organization to be the fiscal sponsor or considering for-profit status. Those individuals and groups who choose to pursue nonprofit status may receive further technical assistance in incorporation; others may discover they can accomplish their purposes in other ways just as effectively.

In response to a demonstrated community need, SLHI is expanding TAP, through the vehicle TAP AZ, to serve as a fiscal sponsor and provider of "back office" technical assistance for organizations and community coalitions that want to pursue a common agenda but don't necessarily need to take on the hassle and expense of a separate organizational structure.

"

A TAP TALE

The Living Well Institute

TAP positioned the community members to develop the strategic plan for a statewide system.

In 2009, a group of seven state agencies, local health departments, nonprofits and other community partners wanted to disseminate and sustain the Stanford Chronic Disease Management program throughout Arizona, where lay trainers educate their peers about how to manage their disease. It is highly effective when properly administered, but it is complicated to implement. The lead agency is required to purchase a relatively expensive license, there are a series of trainers who must be certified, and there is a data collection/evaluation process. A number of hospitals and other organizations had sent individuals to Stanford for training but were having difficulty administering the program because of its complexity.

What to do? They formed a TAP team and worked with a facilitator over the next several months to create a sustainable model for Arizona. The Greater Valley Arizona Health Education Center (GVAHEC) was selected to host the program. They received start-up funding from SLHI and CDC through ADHS in the spring of 2010. GVAHEC holds the license, provides consultation, and coordinates the trainings and data management. The web site www.azlwi.org provides information about training opportunities as well as information about the program. There are 30 partner organizations, 43 master trainers and 117 lay trainers. The program is offered in all counties in the state. They have established sustainability through fees for trainings, data management and sub-licenses. TAP positioned the community members to develop the strategic plan for a statewide system.

Capacity Building For What?

There is general agreement on what capacity building is. There is less agreement – and even some confusion – on the purposes of capacity building, and how capacity building programs should be organized for maximum leverage and impact.

Organizational Capacity

Historically, the emphasis has been on building *organizational* capacity, one definition of which is "the combined influence of an organization's abilities to govern and manage itself, to develop assets and resources, to forge the right community linkages, and to deliver valued services – all combining to meaningfully address its mission."[2] The accompanying graphic, adapted from the Fieldstone Alliance,[3] breaks organizational capacity into six interdependent components, all of which interact with the external environment.

In traditional capacity building programs, consultants with expertise and experience in one or more of the component areas (fund development, board development, strategic planning, communications, etc.) assist organizations in increasing their effectiveness. Many of the consultants in TAP think of organizational capacity building in this basic sense:
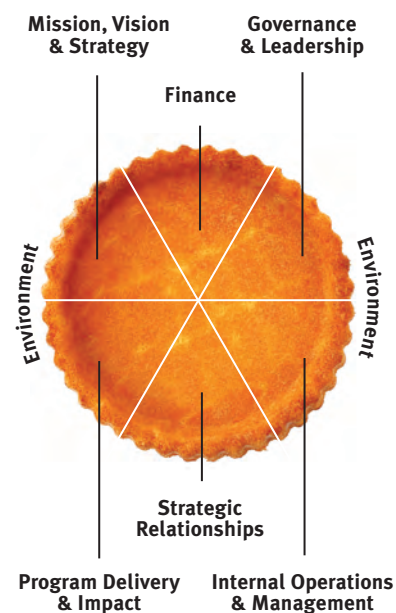
> *"I think of capacity in terms of building skills and infrastructure. You have to have the basics before you can move on to the more complicated stuff like community relationships."*

> *"Capacity building is how an organization builds everything from its programs to infrastructure to connections with the community that help them sustain their mission."*

Throughout its 14-year history, TAP has maintained a core emphasis on these basic components of organizational capacity. Every year multiple TAP teams work with consultants who help them develop specific skills and resources to more effectively advance their mission. As we heard previously from TAP consultants and evaluators, it is not uncommon for organizations to sign up for a TAP group and discover that they need to develop basic organizational components like a sound business plan, a skilled board and fund development infrastructure before they can tackle the more complex issues that arise in community networks and relationships.

This is all fine as far as it goes. The issue is, organizational capacity in this basic sense doesn't go far enough.

Components of Organizational Capacity

Mission, Vision & Strategy · Governance & Leadership · Finance · Environment · Environment · Strategic Relationships · Program Delivery & Impact · Internal Operations & Management

"Is the organization's long-term survivability the goal, These two purposes don't always completely align."

The Pyramid of Organizational Capacity Building[4]

TOP LEVEL: Collective impact: networks and system change

INTERMEDIATE LEVEL: Best practices that lead to high impact

BASE LEVEL: Nonprofit 101: Basic skills and infrastructure

Instead of limiting organization capacity building efforts to a traditional focus on *internal* capacity and basic skills – the core of most capacity building programs today – it is more useful to think of capacity building across three interdependent levels within an emerging social, economic and cultural environment:

BASE LEVEL. This is nonprofit 101 – the basic skills, infrastructure and relationships that all organizations need to function effectively in a highly regulated and competitive environment. Without strong governance, financial support, strategic direction and relationships, and well-honed but flexible program execution, it is hard for an organization to survive, let alone thrive and make progress toward its mission.

INTERMEDIATE LEVEL. Basic skills and infrastructure are not enough. All organizations need to remain flexible and open to discovery and learning. They need to adopt best-at-the-time and emerging practices that lead to high impact and foster a culture of innovation and adaptability to changing circumstances.

TOP LEVEL. Many of the missions nonprofits pursue today – fostering healthy communities, ending homelessness, improving public education, restoring natural habitats – are complex and often contentious, and solutions are not always known in advance. They require participation in a network of stakeholders who are focused on systems change. Accountability and impact are spread across the network, and are not the result of any one organization acting independently.

TAP began with a focus on the base level, and it remains a core component today. Increasingly, however, groups are coming to TAP for assistance in forming coalitions and networks to address a variety of systemic issues in a coordinated and strategic manner. In our view, this is where the opportunity for real leverage and impact is going to be for the foreseeable future. Comprehensive organizational capacity building encompasses all three levels. None of them stands alone.

This is the core of TAP today.

or is the goal to build the accomplishment of mission?

from "Organizational Capacity Building for What?" *The Nonprofit Quarterly*[5]

Confounding Issues in Capacity Building

There are a number of confounding issues in the current state of capacity building that present both challenges and opportunities for nonprofit organizations:

Declining Resources and Increased Demand

In TAP, the anxiety level over the past two years has been palpable as organizations under severe financial stress struggle to keep up with increased demand for services with declining budgets. This was true even for those organizations that had sufficient reserve resources to weather the economic storm. The pressure has caused more leaders to be open to change and willing to try on new relationships and strategies to "do more with less." On the other hand, it has also led to increased competition for scarce resources and a more jaded view of collaboration. In the words of some TAP participants:

> *"Collaboration can only work when you're all on the same team, and there's not this financial pressure on your organization just to survive."*

> *"We play the collaboration game because funders expect it. We all sit at the table, but we don't want to share anything that will take us down, and so we're all sort of smiling and playing nice, and hoping they don't get our contacts for funding and stuff."*

> *"We have to be more strategic in our thinking. We do great work, but we have no idea where we're headed. Losing some state funding last year really cleared our head about that."*

Funderitis

The TAP experience and the Arizona scene confirm national trends in the funding arena, where foundations and other funders are demanding more accountability for outcomes, the adoption of more business-like practices, and a narrowing of interests to those areas where the funder can see a "measurable difference." Too much of this sort of thing can lead to "funderitis" – a hardening of foundation arteries caused by insufficient oxygen of risk and the plaque of a command and control culture. Foundations with early signs of funderitis may be overly prescriptive and obsessed with the "accounting" of accountability, direct their attention and resources to what they consider to be strong "gold standard" organizations and practices, and pass over capacity building for emerging organizations and coalitions. In the words of both TAP participants and consultants alike:

> *"The for-profit sector is more attuned to foundational support to get things started, while funders in the nonprofit sector are mostly interested in programs. A lot of funders aren't interested in capacity building, not really."*

> *"Funders say they want to help you increase your capacity, but then they say we only fund this and not that, and often what you need help with – hiring a fund raiser, for instance, to grow your capacity – is something they won't fund."*

"Capacity building is not a line that is always ascending. Capacity could walk out the door with a particular leader or some other critically important person or resource. You can build infrastructure over time and then see it decimated by crisis or catastrophe. It's not necessarily true that capacity builds over time. You're always 'building' capacity. You're always working to remain resilient and responsive in the face of life's challenges."

B.J. Tatro, *TAP Evaluator*

"Operational costs are not a crime. You'd think they were with some foundations."

"People are overly literal because that's the way they get funded. Your proposal for support is designed to meet the funder's needs, not necessarily your own. The reality of doing capacity building may be nothing like your grant proposal."

An Internal Focus

For all of the talk of strategic partnerships, collaboration and networks, the nonprofit sector remains mired in an organization-centric view of the world. Indeed, there is an industry of consultants, lawyers, accountants, funders and others who are focused on organizational capacity building in a self-referential wheel of mutual support. Their livelihood and programs depend on fostering organizational improvement that leads to improved outcomes and strong communities. The downside is that a fixation on the internal operations of organizations can lead to a preoccupation with organizational sustainability and performance while paying less attention to the critical importance of nurturing networks – other organizations, individuals, sectors – to achieving community change of any significance. In a word, strong organizations are a necessary, but hardly sufficient, condition of large-scale social change.[6]

It is the *balance* between an organizational focus and building the relationships to address real community change that we need to address today. In the words of several of the consultants and nonprofit policy leaders:

"We tend to focus on organizations and programs rather than stepping back and saying, what is the change we want to see, and how can we accomplish it?"

"Instead of investing in traditional strategic planning, let's do community input planning, and then align everything around that. That involves networks and partnerships, it involves learning more about the issues together, and what we can do together to create lasting change."

"In TAP you are building community capacity under the guise of organizational capacity. Participants learn as much from each other as they learn from the consultants."

The Leadership Challenge

Over the past decade, many have noted the coming "crisis in leadership" in the nonprofit sector as the Boomers "age out" of leadership positions in the nonprofit sector and younger leaders are not being mentored to place them. Some studies estimate that anywhere from 50-75 percent of executive directors are planning to leave their jobs in the near future and as many as 640,000 new senior managers may be needed in the next decade.[7]

"We need to get out of the organizational paradigm to a community impact model. You start by being grounded in who you are and what you know and do."

Nonprofit Policy Leader

Alternatively, some believe the problem is that the Boomers *aren't* leaving and are hanging on in the face of serious problems and boards that remain "blissfully unaware" of the problems.[8] Others believe that the problems nonprofit leaders face are amplified not only by the obvious economic and social pressures of the recent past but also by bureaucratic and rigid organizational structures that are ill-suited to remain flexible, adaptive and innovative in an increasingly fluid, ad hoc and networked environment.

Comments from the TAP participant and consultant focus groups, as well as interviews with nonprofit leaders, touched on the leadership challenge:

> *"I am the youngest person in my office, and I do all the Facebook and Twitter and email stuff because I grew up with it. I see a lot of older people unsure about getting out there into this space, but they need to. Leaders have to learn new skills and deal with new ways of communicating."*

> *"Some people are downbeat about the state of the nonprofit sector, the fact that it's aging out, that it's a dinosaur in today's fast changing world, that it hasn't worked. There is a growing impatience with a lack of results. And what do you see? People hanging on to the old structures and hoping things will get better soon."*

> *"Donors want to have impact. Particularly among younger donors, we're seeing that they don't want to just be loyal to one institution. They want to look at how are you making an impact. I think they are not even looking at institutions at all, they are looking at causes in general. How do leaders tap into that?"*

> *"What I see in the TAP groups are leaders who run the risk of getting tired and burnt out because they don't have a functioning and vital board. Not enough leaders see the importance of recruiting a board that will think independently and actually challenge them to think outside the box."*

"Successful organizational capacity building – building strong boards, sustainable funding, good planning – won't of itself change communities. The whole nonprofit sector is engrossed in internal capacity and organizational strength. You can get a degree in nonprofit management, but you can't get a degree in how you can change the world."

Hildy Gottlieb, CreatingtheFuture.org

TAP Tensions

Lessons Learned and Future Directions

The genesis of TAP over its 14-year history contains a series of central tensions and lessons that are applicable to the nonprofit sector generally and to anyone who is interested in what the future might hold for addressing complex issues in an environment that is paradoxically becoming more fragmented and interdependent at once.

The tension between control and self-organization and flexibility.

All organizations and individuals establish boundaries and measures of control to engage in purposeful activity. One would not fly a jetliner or devise an evacuation plan for an area during a natural catastrophe by allowing everyone to "self-organize." In dealing with complex and emergent issues, however, where the variables are interdependent, system resilience depends on a measure of self-organization and flexibility as boundaries shift in response to exogenous factors. This is especially true of social phenomena such as poverty, education, health care, economic development and other areas, where variables are often impossible to isolate and control independently.

The core of TAP is self-organizing teams and flexibility in responding to the interests of the community. On the other end, there are calls for increasing control of the boundaries – qualifying participants, establishing program "levels," establishing tighter requirements for consultants to demonstrate proficiency in asset-based community development – to make the program more efficient and effective.

SLHI has resisted this for two reasons: First, over the years TAP has proven remarkably responsive and adaptable to changing socio-economic conditions in Arizona, and its "fluid" organizational structure seems preferable to a more tightly wound environment. Second, there are other capacity building programs in the market that are more formally structured and arranged (academic-based programs come to mind), and TAP would risk losing its unique identity in the community if it were to resemble other programs.

There is a third reason as well. It may be that "things fall apart, the center cannot hold," as the poet William Butler Yeats wrote 90 years ago. It may also be that the center of an old world order is destined to be replaced by *centers* in an emerging order that is characterized by permeable networks of geographical, political, business and civic bodies. These centers foster innovation and adaptability, which arise more naturally in an environment of experimentation, discovery and cross-sector pollination than in hierarchical and organization-centric systems. If this scenario is likely, then organizations need to look *outward* to achieve their missions and ensure their sustainability and relevance. The hard part is learning what to keep, and what to *let go*.

TAP would risk losing its unique identity in the community if it were to resemble other programs: more formally structured and arranged.

The tension between accountability at the organizational level and accountability across networks.

One of the challenges in looking outward to achieve social change is an organizational governance structure that forces participants first to look inward to satisfy demands of organizational accountability. Everything SLHI is engaged in to achieve its mission involves participation with other organizations and individuals, yet accountability for achieving our goals is invariably framed within an internal organizational context: our own board, budget, programs and resources.

Networks work best when they preserve organizational autonomy and avoid rigid hierarchical controls, "yet have agendas that are interdependent and benefit from consultation and coordination."[9] Over time, members may develop strategic interests that override individual interests, invest in a collective infrastructure and – so long as they do not "devolve" into a hierarchical institution – "spin out" into the larger society in a fluid, dynamic manner.

Theorists are starting to think of what governance and accountability might look like in an increasingly networked environment.[10] Based on SLHI's own experience with nurturing coalitions in TAP and with community-of-practice networks more generally, it is difficult to achieve a sense of ownership and commitment – and therefore to have a corresponding sense of accountability – when organizations in the network are not perceived as equals from the outset, or where leadership is concentrated in a few participant organizations and not spread out across many levels. Networks with both funders and nonprofits that may seek financial support from them can be problematic when funders (or any dominant nonprofit for that matter) seek to maintain a measure of control and influence commensurate with perceptions of their own internal accountability, and consequently don't encourage leadership to germinate and grow across the entire network.

Organizations like SLHI and other nonprofits that work together in networks to achieve common goals in a complex and fluid environment will continue to need a strong level of internal organizational governance and leadership to effectively achieve their mission. But they may no longer be as autonomous and "in charge" of their own destiny in a network with many different levels spread out across the broader community. It is in the pursuit of accountability through adaptable, *multi-level* networks where our best hope for achieving lasting impact will lie.

The tension between strategy, execution and culture.

It is common to observe that execution trumps strategy. We would go a step further and say that culture trumps execution.

By 'culture' we refer to widely shared values, mores, beliefs and practices. An organization may have the right strategy and great execution, but it won't be sustainable and spread out in an ever wider arc of positive effect without a strong, reinforcing culture. In TAP and the various coalitions and communities of practice with which SLHI is associated, people come from a variety of organizational and cultural backgrounds: small start-ups, larger organizations, recently arrived immigrants, Native Americans, Latinos, African-Americans, business executives, etc. We have learned that if you don't start from where people *are* rather than where you think they ought to be, all of the grand talk about strategic planning, program execution, funding cycles and measures of performance is likely to have little impact.

TAP emerged organically in the community over a period of time as people gathered, shared a meal, developed bonds of social reciprocity and established a level of mutual support and trust. In the process, SLHI learned that its own perceptions of time and "benchmarks" of success could be out of sync with perceptions of time and social cohesiveness in quite distinct communities. One of the surprising results of participating in TAP over the past 14 years is that our own organizational culture has become more open and fluid as we have learned to adapt programs to local conditions and not obsess about control of our own pre-conceived strategy. By providing an environment where people meet, break bread together and engage in common work, SLHI both gains the trust and acceptance of a growing community of local partner organizations, leaders and consultants, and nurtures bonds of social reciprocity that constitute the "community" in community of learners. This, in turn, enhances communication and our common work in fostering healthy communities of place.

Admittedly, the TAP model does not suit every situation. Organizations that practice "venture" or "strategic" philanthropy, with its emphasis on focus, metrics and time-driven results, might find the approach to be too loose and chaotic. Others may prefer the more traditional grantor-grantee approach, where the funder is once removed from program operations and simply provides financial support if the program's objectives align with its interests. Still others may prefer to identify and fund capacity building in individual organizations after a rigorous selection process, as distinct from a team-based approach.

For SLHI, our cultural journey from a traditional funder to a quasi-operational foundation is grounded in the experience of participating ourselves in the TAP network and communities of practice, and not simply watching it from afar and getting an evaluation report at the end of the year. We learn as much or more as our community partners about how to leverage community assets to improve health across a broad spectrum of indicators. In the end, this is no small thing.

It is common to observe that execution trumps strategy. We would go a step further and say that culture trumps execution.

The tension between ownership, commitment and involvement.

Approximately 3,500 people and 1,400 organizations have been involved in TAP since the program's inception in 1997. Hundreds more have been involved in the consultant community of practice and other learning networks that SLHI facilitates. It is a smaller number of people, however, who are actually *committed* to the principles and practices of asset-based community building, as evidenced by leadership in their own organizations and community, and voluntary efforts to participate in and strengthen the networks that promote these principles.

Commitment grows out of involvement, while ownership – apart from its legal dimensions – grows out of commitment over time. It is common to hear funders say they want the community to take "ownership" of the issue or project, but it is less common for them to foster the conditions in which commitment and ownership flourish. This requires establishing connections at three levels:

1. The *rational* – getting people to understand the central issues in the community and their potential role and responsibilities in addressing them.

2. The *emotional* – creating an environment that exudes passion and energy, and promotes self-esteem and worth.

3. The *motivational* – purposeful activity that is challenging, meaningful and satisfying to community members.

Organizations and individuals may be involved in a breadth of activities but have limited time, energy and interest to be committed to all of them at a high level. Without rational prioritization and sufficient emotional and motivational buy-in to stay committed for the long term, the tendency is to be involved on the edge or eventually drop out. As we have previously discussed, funders and other organizations that work to build coalitions and community capacity need to have realistic expectations about establishing a strong sense of ownership among participants, but they can decrease the drop-out rate and improve the likelihood of stronger commitment over time by forming a network of equals, and not a top-down, prescriptive hierarchy; cultivate leadership at many levels, especially deep within the community itself; adapt to the culture of the community rather than try to squeeze participants into a formal process of accountability and control; and create multiple opportunities for people to connect and communicate.

Most of all, moving from involvement to commitment and ownership takes *patience* and *time*, both of which are under assault in today's hyper-charged and immediate results-oriented world.

Commitment grows out of involvement, while ownership – apart from its legal dimensions – grows out of commitment over time.

The Future of TAP

SLHI has been involved with TAP over its entire 14-year history. At one point when the program was well established, we thought of "spinning it off" to another organization or coalition for oversight and support. At the time we reasoned this would be consistent with our role as a community catalyst – provide a spark to get things started and then move on to the next new thing.

It's a familiar enough syndrome in the foundation world: Provide start-up support and core funding during the early years, then transition away as the organization develops a broader base of support and others in the community take ownership.

But a strange thing happened along the way. SLHI *became* TAP. We made so many new friends, established so many new community connections, facilitated so many community coalitions and learned so much from others about community building and related policy development that in the end it became impossible to separate ourselves from what has become, by all accounts, a rich and interdependent *learning network*.

SLHI is committed to TAP's future but remains open as to what form that future might take. The basic structure of TAP has changed little over the years. It's still all about self-organizing teams, emerging coalitions, a wide range of both basic and emerging issues in capacity building, a growing consultant community, asset-based community development and getting better together. It's decidedly free flowing and provisional – to a fault, some believe – and, like any market-based endeavor, is contingent upon new and repeat customers.

If we could predict the future,
there would be nothing to learn.

One Scenario

- The decline in federal and state support for nonprofits will continue. More TAP teams will form around issues of organizational survival, mergers and partnerships, innovation and new sources of contributed and earned revenue. A separate "TAP Track" will emerge to address these issues in a distributed learning network.

- There will be more ad hoc, just-in-time coalitions forming to address critical community issues, with an increased emphasis on advocacy. This will translate into less emphasis on formal organizations and the rise of intermediary fiscal sponsors and shared back office operations. SLHI is creating *TAP Az* – a fiscal sponsor and provider of back office support – for just this purpose.

- Arizona's future is tied to demographic shifts and the potential growing political clout of Hispanics. TAP will become one of several state incubators for Hispanic-led networks and organizations. More participants and consultants will come from the Hispanic community.

- Governments will step up the pressure on tax-exempt organizations to provide "proof of impact" for continued exemption. In addition to more TAP teams and workshops on measuring performance in rhetorically powerful ways, TAP will begin to produce its own series of primers and other tools to help nonprofits document and tell their story more effectively, as well as on more general topics of organizational capacity building.

- With an increase in "meaningful" volunteerism as Boomers retire, TAP will have the opportunity to "tap" into a much broader pool of expertise and talent. Some of these people will refresh the consultant community, others will be linked to various coalitions nurtured in TAP. One could even envision TAP as a volunteer referral network.

- The increasing dominance of networks and new forms of organizational accountability may well precipitate an expanded TAP governance structure, where SLHI is one of several members of a "TAP Council," or something similar, with representation from nonprofits, the consultant community and other stakeholders.

- Nonprofit board engagement and diversity will become more important in a networked age. Board members occasionally come to TAP sessions now; this will increase significantly in the future as TAP tailors sessions specifically for them, most likely in partnership with other board development organizations.

- Calls for increased structure in TAP will occur organically as more outside funders contract with TAP to provide specific capacity building services in a team environment. In addition to responding to the interests of participants, TAP will break out multi-level tracks in both basic and emerging capacity building issues that cross what are today discrete program sessions. There will be even more program variation in the future than there is today.

We can't predict the future, but we can imagine a better world and work together to make it a reality. Here is one scenario of what TAP might look like in the future in light of emerging trends.

The TAP model of organizational and community capacity building has thrived in the greater Phoenix metro area, and we believe it is eminently portable to other states and regional locations. There is no fixed recipe for success. It depends on a relatively open and flexible environment, a sponsoring organization that is comfortable working with networks and shared control, the availability of experienced consultants to work with teams, and a willingness to revise and adapt to inevitable changes in organizational and community boundaries.

Most important, it depends on an openness to surprise and discovery – and a willingness to be transformed yourself by the TAP collaborative process.

Notes

1   There are many definitions of capacity building and ways of organizing a capacity building "curriculum." The Fieldstone Alliance provides one good overview in *Tools You Can Use* at http://www.fieldstonealliance.org/client/tools_you_can_use/06-20-06_cap_bldg.cfm.

2   Dougherty, S., Mayer, S. (2003). "Capacity Building Programs for Nonprofit Programs." Effective Communities Project, www.effectivecommunities.com.

3   Fieldstone Alliance, op.cit.

4   We are indebted to Cassandra O'Neill, an Arizona consultant with extensive nonprofit experience, for this graphic representation of the dimensions of organizational capacity building. www.wholonomyconsulting.com.

5   McCambridge, Ruth. (2010). "Nonprofit Capacity Building for What?" *The Nonprofit Quarterly*, Vol. 17: 4, p. 8.

6   Kania, J., Kramer, M. (2011). "Collective Impact." *Stanford Social Innovation Review*, Accessed March 15, 2011 at http://www.ssireview.org/site/printer/collective_impact.

7   Quoted in McAndrews, C., Kunreuther, F. (2008). "Facing the Leadership Crisis." *Working Strategies*, Vol. 12, Issue 1. Accessed April 26, 2011 at http://www.familyresourcecenters.net/content/index.php?pid=161.

8   McCambridge, Ruth. (2010). op. cit.

9   Ronfelt, D. (1996). *Tribes, Institutions, Markets, Networks: A Framework About Societal Evolution*. The Rand Corporation. Accessed on April 28, 2011 at http://p2pfoundation.net/David_Ronfeldt_on_the_Evolution_of_Governance.

10 Renz, D.O. (2010) "Reframing Governance." *The Nonprofit Quarterly*, Vol. 17: 4, pp. 50-53.

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