



Moving the Bureaucracy

Securing the policy change is often the “easy” part.

What innovative strategies did UHI sites employ to help bureaucracies carry out policy changes, and to ensure that the reforms live beyond changes in administrations? How did UHI sites help bridge institutional differences to help bureaucracies work together in new ways?

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About the Urban Health Initiative

The Robert Wood Johnson Foundation (RWJF) established the Urban Health Initiative (UHI) in 1995 to determine whether a concerted, collaborative effort can bring about region-wide improvements in multiple measures of child health and safety. Five cities were chosen to implement UHI. These cities and their respective UHI campaigns are:

- Baltimore's Safe and Sound Campaign
- Mayor's Time (Detroit)
- Safe Passages (Oakland)
- Philadelphia Safe and Sound
- Youth Matters (Richmond)

UHI campaigns work to implement proven programmatic strategies at such a large scale that citywide statistics will improve significantly. To do that, UHI campaigns must be change agents to secure systemic policy and fiscal changes necessary to get strategies to that scale.

The UHI was designed to be non-prescriptive, allowing communities to craft implementation plans based on local conditions without assumptions, mandates or imperatives set forward by RWJF, which made a ten-year funding commitment.

The National Program Office (NPO) based in Seattle provides guidance, technical assistance and oversight to the local UHI campaigns in a number of areas including research, management, systems change and communications. The NPO also helps campaigns attract and develop the local leaders essential to bring about and sustain change in their cities. Former Seattle Mayor Charles Royer is national program director.

About the UHI's Lessons Learned Project

The UHI has learned a great deal with regard to developing change agent organizations and securing change in large cities. The NPO is working to catalogue these lessons so they can benefit future change agent organizations and their funders. As of January 2006, these other papers had been written (and more are in the works):

- Political Strategizing in a Constantly Changing Environment
- Sustainable Funding for Program Strategies
- Developing Local Infrastructure: The Salience of Muddling Through
- Using Data in the Decision-Making Process
- Enlisting Leaders in Community Change: The UHI Fellows Program
- The Experience of an Intermediary in a Complex Systems-Change Initiative: The Urban Health Initiative's National Program Office
- Reflections on the Start-Up of the Urban Health Initiative
- The Origins of the Urban Health Initiative
- Communications Planning by Change Agents

All papers can be found on the UHI's website, www.urbanhealth.org. Comments, suggestions and questions about the UHI Lessons Learned Project are welcome. Contact Jerry VanderWood, UHI Director of Communications, at 206-812-1197 or jvanderwood@instituteformcommunitychange.org.

Moving the Bureaucracy

By Jerry VanderWood¹

Introduction

The School Superintendent and Health Department Director make the decision to have their two systems work together to reduce violence in the schools.

The health department and private agencies agree to instill a family literacy aspect into the home health system.

The Mayor, police chief, social services director and probation chief agree to join forces to implement an ambitious youth violence reduction program.

The director of social services and the police chief agree to share resources and provide new services for young children exposed to violence.

Then what happens?

How does the decision get carried out throughout the bureaucracies? How does policy get translated into practice? How do the middle managers and line staff, such as social workers and cops, develop the new practices that will make the new policy effective and long lasting? How are the differences in missions, cultures, styles and resources ironed out in order to create new working relationships among systems and a new program that is integrated within – and not tenuously added onto – the systems?

The local sites that comprise the UHI have had many successes in moving the bureaucracy, that is, ensuring that policy change is not symbolic and that real change is embraced by and implemented within all levels of a bureaucracy. This paper shares the tactics and traits necessary to be effective in moving the bureaucracy – from the point of view of not just the UHI sites themselves, but from the leadership of large government agencies. The paper is an amalgam of what the sites have done that seem effective, and what agency heads believe are important traits for a change agent.

In working so actively to implement a policy change, the UHI sites distinguish themselves from traditional advocacy organizations. In their paper *Advocacy Organizations in the U.S. Political Process*², Andrews and Edwards describe the various definitions and roles of advocacy organizations. They discuss the steps these groups make with regard to the policy process: agenda setting, access to decision-making arenas, achieving favorable policies, and shifting the long-term priorities and resources of political institutions.

Looking at that list and thinking of the UHI sites, one would say check, check, check and check – the UHI sites are heavily involved in all four of those activities and processes. However, Andrews and Edwards note a fifth process: monitoring and shaping implementation of a policy change. They say that one of the most important activities of advocacy groups is “monitoring” policy implementation, and when necessary, serving as “whistleblowers” when policy implementation is going south.

¹ Jerry VanderWood is Director of Communications for the UHI's National Program Office

² Andrews, Kenneth and Edwards, Bob, *Advocacy Organizations in the U.S. Political Process*, *Annual Review of Sociology*, Vol. 30 (August 2004)

This is one of the fundamental distinctions between the UHI sites and traditional advocacy groups. UHI sites are far more actively involved than simply monitoring and whistle blowing. UHI sites work closely with governmental decision makers and anyone involved in assuring successful implementation of a policy. The sites' leaders and staff roll up their sleeves and do the hard work – often technical, personal and politically dicey – of helping all layers of a bureaucracy integrate the new way of doing business. They don't just advocate for it, they do what it takes to make it happen.

The primary objective of the UHI sites is to implement best practice strategies at such a large scale that selected citywide health and safety outcomes improve. To accomplish that, the sites have to secure policy changes – legislative or administrative decisions necessary for the sites' best practice strategies to be implemented and/or dramatically expanded.

Those working in the policy arena know that sometimes the policy change made at the top does not get carried out, or at least does not get carried out well and in a timely fashion, throughout the system or bureaucracy. And if it does not become integrated throughout the system, the work to secure the policy change is for naught.

Thus, another important objective of the UHI sites is to help all layers of a system integrate the new policy and put it into permanent practice. Most of this work involves bringing two or more systems – such as juvenile justice and human services – together in a new working relationship.

Those of us who run systems usually rush back to our institutions after making policy decisions and give what little time we can to the operationalization of these policy changes. But when we get back to our daily responsibilities, who thinks about the nature of the relationship between entities that are supposed to implement the new policy? Who thinks about the kind of structural pieces and components that translate a decision into an operational agenda? Who takes the policy decision and articulates the tactics that make that policy choice manifest? Organizations like the UHI sites take a broad policy decision and help figure out the regulatory framework that operationalizes it. They turn that policy decision into a regulatory framework that talks about what you should be doing and how you should be doing it. What does that look like in terms of practice, in terms of memorandums of understanding among different systems?

– Chet Hewitt, Director, Alameda County Social Services Agency

Over the ten years that the Safe and Sound Campaign has been operating, there has been a sea change in how focused the city's efforts are on the health and safety of kids. To have this convening organization, facilitator and data collector, and to have it keep us focused on important issues and projects that are data-based, really made a difference rather than us taking a scatter shot approach.

– Peter Beilenson, former Commissioner, Baltimore City Health Department

Why the Need for Outside Change Agents?

When a policy change is made, shouldn't its full implementation just happen by fiat from the top? Why is an outside change agent necessary? Certainly, systems quite often reform themselves and change their practices without outside assistance. But sometimes it does not occur "naturally," especially when the change involves two or more different systems working together in a new way.

The most often cited reason for that is lack of resources (time, money, knowledge). Social service agencies in particular are chronically under-funded, with line staff pressured to achieve results with increasingly fewer resources. Staff spend all of their time on immediate issues, and often don't have the luxury of doing their regular work and incorporating a new practice – even if the new practice improves results or is a time saver in the long run.

Staff may also be skeptical if they believe a new way of doing business comes with no new funding – in these cases the perceptions that the new practice is unnecessary or at best a temporary “add on” are likely correct. There is not much motivation to make the modification.

In other cases, staff may simply not understand the bigger vision, the context that will help them appreciate how the change will make things better for their clients, their agency and themselves. Sometimes staff may not be familiar with another bureaucracy they are to work with in new ways; the operations and values of the two bureaucracies may not immediately mesh.

In some cases workers in the bureaucracy simply do not want to make the change – resistance for the sake of resistance. For these folks it's a matter of waiting out a change in administrations, at which time the new policy might be discarded or reversed.

Maybe new policies and practices should “just happen,” but once you spend some time with any of these systems, you realize just how many obstacles there are. There are cases in which people don't want to do it, but usually it's about time and money and people can't make those appear magically, they're trying the best they can. You can't always expect people to do things differently and not help them.

– Laura (Pinkney) Hewitt, former Executive Director, Safe Passages

This paper was intended to look at what happens after a policy change is made; that is, what it is that change-agent organizations such as the UHI sites do to implement the policy after a policy decision is made. However, nearly everyone interviewed made the case that the period *before* a policy decision is key to the policy's ultimate implementation throughout the system. Below are some of the tactics that UHI sites used before and after the policy change to integrate it throughout the systems.

Get the Right People on the Bus

When promoting a policy change to government, it's easy enough to figure out which department heads to work with, for example a juvenile justice policy might involve the police chief, District Attorney, probation head and the director of human services. The trickier but just as important question is, who within middle management or line staff has the knowledge and influence to help or hinder the execution of the policy change? Those are the individuals that change agents need to seek out and recruit early in the process. By having input on the policy development and its implementation, these folks gain ownership of the new initiative, and are vested in its effective execution. They are much more likely to use their formal authority and informal power to ensure effective integration of the new policy.

We talk about who owns this. Who's the guy in the basement saying this is the way it's got to be. Once you get to those individuals, then when you talk about changing policies, they're the ones that are going to support you and not fight you.

– Grenaé Dudley, Executive Director, Mayor's Time

A complement to enlisting influential supervisors and workers is involving the group of “early adopters” within the system. In most cases, not everyone needs to adopt a new practice all at once. Change agents can start with those who are interested in the new policy and eager to put it into action. Assuming the results (for the clients, the workers and the agency) are positive, others in the agency become motivated to adopt the new practice.

Walk a Mile in Their Shoes

Everyone interviewed for this paper agreed on The Main Thing for effectively moving a bureaucracy: Credibility. Change agents need to have credibility with the bureaucracies they are trying to change. Certainly it is not the only requirement, but credibility is the underpinning of every other step of the process. Without it, the change agent is just one more outsider trying to shoehorn something new into an already overworked system, only to be dismissed after a short period of time. In this context “credibility” means trustworthiness and all of its synonyms: reliability, integrity, authority, standing, expertise and sincerity.

Perhaps the best way for change agents to be credible is to understand the problems and constraints of the bureaucracy. Actually, it’s more than that: change agents should not merely *understand* the system and its challenges, they should *really know* them.

Change agents need to be willing to walk a mile in someone else’s shoes. Unlike traditional advocacy and lobbying that is supposed to go up against a system and push and critique, a change agent – if it is going to do systems change at all levels – has to understand the restrictions and constrictions of big public systems. For example, often these systems have restricted funding and staffing issues defined by unions and civil service.

– Andrea Youngdahl, Director, Department of Human Services, Oakland, and UHI Fellow

Knowing the nuances of a bureaucracy’s rules and funding helps change agents avoid promoting unfeasible modifications in work practices. This knowledge also helps them make the most of the points of leverage within the bureaucracy. Change agents that understand the operational rules, and the mechanics of funding thereof, also understand why services and outcomes may not be what everyone wants them to be. It’s not because people aren’t trying hard, it’s because the system itself is not quite set up or funded in the best possible way. Change agents can then approach the system without any air of scapegoating. This, in turn, builds trust between the change agent and those working in the system.

We let everybody breathe a little bit. There’s always a need for additional resources, and acknowledging that gives people the ability to not feel so darn guilty that it’s messed up now. Change agents need to believe that individuals in bureaucracies are doing a very hard job, that the systems are way oversubscribed. So there is an earnestness and genuine shaping of the problem that doesn’t blame the workers themselves.

– Hathaway Ferebee, Executive Director, Baltimore’s Safe and Sound Campaign

Understanding rules and budgets is important, as is appreciating the culture of a bureaucracy. This is particularly true when a change agent is helping to bring two bureaucracies together in a new working relationship. Consider the challenge for Oakland’s Safe Passages, which helped initiate a new program in which police officers and social workers were to work together to reduce the impact on children of exposure to violence. Meetings to implement

the new program involved “hardened” cops and “touchy feely” social workers. Fortunately, Safe Passages’ staff knew that the two groups were often sharing the same goals, but speaking about them differently, and bridged the lexicon differences. Plus, there was some angst that the new program would mean the police and social workers would in some small way have to incorporate some of the role of the other group. Safe Passages’ anticipated this and assured both that although new practices would be put in place, the new program meant that each would still be sticking to their strong points: arresting perpetrators or providing services to children.

Having this much insight into the operations, culture and personalities of a bureaucracy does not come naturally. It comes through experience, through (almost literally) walking a mile in the members of a bureaucracy’s shoes. Ideally, change agents should have among their staff those who have worked within those bureaucracies.

When it comes to pursuing mechanisms for change that require the buy-in from people in government, Safe and Sound can help create that buy-in because they’ve been there. Safe and Sound is staffed largely by people who come from government. So they understand the problems, they recognize what it’s like to work in a bureaucracy, and they know where the leverage can be exercised.

– Charlie Lyons, Acting President and CEO, Philadelphia Safe and Sound

Provide Exposure to New Ideas

UHI sites brought ideas about new ways of doing business to people in all levels of the bureaucracies, helping them see the possibilities for change. One tactic for doing so was the Inter-City Leadership Visits, planned and executed by the UHI’s National Program Office and funded through the grant from RWJF. Through the ICLVs, delegations of individuals from government, business and philanthropy from UHI cities traveled to learn about a host city’s system change efforts. More than 100 individuals from the UHI cities would engage in peer-to-peer discussions with those who implemented change and reform within such systems as juvenile justice and education. The visits provided ideas for change within the UHI cities and insight into how the change came about. (See Appendix 1, *Seed for Baltimore’s foster care reforms planted in visit to San Diego.*)

The sites also brought those with new ideas to their own cities. For example, Baltimore’s Safe and Sound Campaign and Philadelphia Safe and Sound brought David Kennedy and Eugene Rivers, pioneers of the “Boston Model” juvenile justice reform effort, to their cities. They met with the leadership of the agencies who would have to make policy changes in order for Baltimore and Philadelphia to adopt a version of Boston’s model. In some instances, cross site visits with Boston were arranged to allow agency representatives to meet their middle management peers as well – those, such as clergy, police, probation officers and attorneys from the District Attorney’s office, who might be involved in implementing new practices, should the policy change occur. The purpose of visits was for the sites to introduce new ways of doing business and say, “we’re exploring this,” thereby giving those who would carry out the new practice the opportunity to ponder and shape the new policy. Ultimately, Baltimore and Philadelphia implemented versions of the Boston strategy.

In these and other ways, the UHI provided both policymakers and line staff opportunities to see, consider, customize and implement ideas that are working in other places.

All our trips with the UHI to view other efforts have been critical. It has been valuable in that we've brought new information from other places that opens up the dialogue and makes local areas less insular. People's eyes are opened; we see other possibilities. We see other jurisdictions that have the same challenges and human conditions in an urban area, but that are looking at it through a different lens, and have tried different ways to address problems.

– Andrea Youngdahl, Director, Department of Human Services, Oakland, and UHI Fellow

It's important to approach it with the thought that, I know enough about this bureaucracy, I understand them, I understand their challenges, and I've been around long enough with them that we've developed relationships and trust. Then you have the freedom to display for them how this business gets done in places where they are doing it differently, or having more success, and are excited about working in a different way. People can get isolated if not going on trips to see new ways of doing business; they need to be able to look up from their day-to-day responsibilities and see that people can do it differently.

– Charles Royer, National Program Director, Urban Health Initiative

Demonstrate the Possibilities

In addition to peer-to-peer communications, data is a tool used by UHI sites to convince those within a bureaucracy to embrace change. Data can help all involved zero-in on the magnitude of a problem, and it can provide evidence that change can make a difference in solving it. One of the more important legacies of the UHI is the work some sites have done to create effective data systems for their cities – mining, analyzing and effectively communicating data to improve decision-making. See the UHI Lessons Learned paper, *Using Data in the Decision Making Process*³, for a more in-depth look at these efforts.

As it pertains to moving the bureaucracy, perhaps the most valuable aspect of this data work is its focusing role. It reminds staff of the people behind the statistics – the clients who need help and whose lives could be improved through a new way of doing business. As one executive director said, “We bring a strong commitment to better outcomes, and we bring information to affirm that this policy will create a better outcome.”

People gravitate toward jobs in human services because they want to improve the quality of life of people. Some may become jaded, but if you identify that the original reason for gravitating toward that profession was to help people, and if you demonstrate how integrating certain kinds of programs and practices into their work will help them achieve those goals, they will accept the new practices. For example, Philadelphia passed an ordinance requiring hospitals to report to the police every incident involving gunshot victims. Hospitals and their staff were very hesitant to comply. Much of the resistance had to do with the extra paperwork, and the perception that the extra work wouldn't make a difference, the information would just be warehoused somewhere. We focused on the goal of reducing the number of injuries and assuring that each case was investigated in order to reduce retaliatory action and get young people out of harm's way. And we showed them the data – young people were indeed receiving interventions and services. Once we did that, the extra work became worthwhile.

– Naomi Post, former President and CEO, Philadelphia Safe and Sound, and UHI Fellow

³ Available at www.urbanhealth.org

Because data is collected and shared, those in the systems get the information they've always wanted to make their own decisions and make evaluations of what they've done. On the front end it's a huge help to supervisors and clinicians in that they get to see real numbers. We always include data in the new way of doing business. For example, with the family recovery program⁴, the partners meet regularly to track data. Everyone involved gets information to know, did we do what we said we would do at each leg of the strategy? That sort of data is really important when you're doing something new, it keeps people on track. It keeps people from blaming each other if things go wrong but they don't know where. It gives them the information to let them know where to stay the course and where to make corrections.

– Hathaway Ferebee, Executive Director, Baltimore's Safe and Sound Campaign

Another method of exposing workers in a bureaucracy to better ways of conducting business is pilot projects. In some cases UHI sites were able to use some of their RWJF grant to initiate pilots. The UHI's National Program Office expressed caution regarding this approach: directly funding programs is not part of the UHI's core mission of getting best practices to scale⁵ via systems change. Nevertheless, where pilots funded from a site's grant were critical steps to getting buy in from a bureaucracy and enhancing the prospect of going to scale, they went forward. In some cases, other philanthropies and agency heads with discretionary dollars were able to fund pilots. No matter how the pilots are funded, once they prove successful, other staff within the systems are more likely to expand the effort.

Another aspect of “demonstrating the possibilities” cited in interviews for this paper is the advantage of explaining to rank-and-file staff what their personal benefit could be. Middle managers and line staff within bureaucracies may consciously or unconsciously wonder, “What's in it for me?” Change agents can help these staff feel more comfortable with a change by showing (hopefully with sound data) how the change will make their work life less stressful and more productive. Plus, knowing that most of these staff are motivated by providing good service and achieving improved health and safety outcomes among children and families, change agents can answer “What's in it for me?” by demonstrating how the new initiative will help them reach both of those goals.

The bureaucracy has to have a reason to want to change. An organization will do whatever the leaders tell it to do – at some level or for some period of time. But for real change you want to convince them it will help them do their work better, faster – and with more satisfaction and better results for kids.

– Charles Royer, UHI National Program Director

Top Down or Bottom Up? Both

All who were interviewed agreed that involving the middle and service-level layers of the bureaucracy was essential for rapid and smooth implementation of a new policy. In most instances this meant having the lower levels help shape the policy change itself; in all cases these levels helped shape the new practices that would carry out the policy.

⁴ The family recovery program is a new effort in Maryland through which drug- or alcohol-addicted parents are provided treatment and case management to accelerate their recovery and minimize the length of time their children are in foster care.

⁵ For the UHI, scale is defined as the number of children/families to be reached by a specific best practice strategy in order for citywide statistics to improve significantly.

By having the opportunity to give input, the workers within a bureaucracy gain some ownership over the change, and are much more likely to incorporate the new way of working than they would be if it were simply decreed. Plus, this input allows many of the bugs to be worked out either before the policy is enacted or early in its implementation.

The UHI sites emphasize that the middle and service layers were not providing token input – and that it would be anathema for it to be perceived as such. On the contrary, the sites and their partners approached workers within a bureaucracy as experts who knew best how to implement the change. As one site executive director described her approach to those within the bureaucracy, “I may know what I want to see in the end but I may not be the expert on how to make it happen.”

The issue was, how do you engage the partners so people understand roles and responsibilities and develop a sense of ownership and participation? That is, to get to the point where they are thinking, instead of being done unto me, now I will get to be a part of figuring out how it’s getting done. We worked to ferret out people’s concerns, sent drafts back and forth so all could see and comment, and generally worked from a consensus model. People are informed, have opportunity to respond, and understand why the final product looks the way it does.

– Jo Ann Lawer, former President and CEO, Philadelphia Safe and Sound

What we’ve always done, because it makes the new policy stronger, is have those people working it – for example probation officers, detectives, state’s attorneys – to help shape what is to be done differently. It’s a commitment to structure the day-to-day operations under the new policy in a way that people who have the experience recommend that it be done.

– Hathaway Ferebee, Executive Director, Baltimore’s Safe and Sound Campaign

As important as it is to involve lower levels in the shaping of policies and practices, the impetus for change can’t be just “bottom up”. Changes in practices and service delivery may indeed percolate from the bottom, but unless there is a push and coordination from the top, those changes won’t be very far-reaching. Only the top layer can make the actual policy change, marshal resources for its implementation, pool resources with other bureaucracies, and provide the “or else” statement to those who may simply be intransigent.

A simultaneous top-down, bottom-up approach is preferred. Change agents must ensure that the input of the middle and lower levels is heard at the top level. At the same time, the lower levels have to know that the change agent has the ear of the top level and can influence the engagement of a “top down” approach if need be. It’s a delicate, but effective, balancing act.

The UHI sites have used a variety of top-down/bottom-up approaches. One particular method has been the creation of multiple committees. For example, when Philadelphia Safe and Sound and its partners created the Youth Violence Reduction Partnership (YVRP)⁶, they developed a layered committee structure for agency heads, supervisors and line workers:

- A steering committee that has the leadership from all the major partners, including the court system, adult and juvenile probation, District Attorney’s office, human

⁶ YVRP is an endeavor of various youth-serving organizations and criminal justice agencies in Philadelphia. It seeks to reduce the city’s homicide rate and put violent youthful offenders on the path to a productive adulthood through increased support and increased supervision of participants.

services, the school district and Safe and Sound. The leaders of these entities meet regularly to talk about how to structure a system, what policies need to be changed, and how to work together more productively.

- A management committee of mid-level supervisors who come together regularly to address practice problems that arise as agencies work more closely and differently together.
- An operations committee of on-the-ground staff who meet regularly to discuss their interactions, their clients, “hot spot” locations of violent juvenile activity and training needs.

Bring Resources

Implementing new strategies almost always costs money. Even in cases where the new initiative saves public dollars in the long term, there usually is a need for up-front investments. So with regard to moving the bureaucracy, money is often a necessary factor. Money also plays an important symbolic role: If no new stable funding is attached to a new strategy, those who are expected to implement it may infer that it’s a fly-by-night initiative without much priority attached to it by the heads of the systems, which can be a big demotivator for implementation.

Therefore, one of the paramount activities of the UHI sites is to generate new or redirect existing sources of funding for the strategies it promotes. Some of the ways in which the sites and their partners have generated funding for its strategies are through new revenues (such as franchise fees for teams benefiting from public dollars dedicated toward new stadium construction in Philadelphia) and redirected dollars (such as more effective use of Medi-Cal dollars for after school programming in Oakland). Some of the tactics used by the sites to secure funding have been to make the case for a fairer allocation of existing funds (such as Mayor’s Time successful effort to increase Detroit’s share of the state’s 21st Century Community Learning Center funds to a level proportionate to the city’s percentage of low income residents). One tactic used in Baltimore was to convince the state government to promise greater investments in preventive programming out of savings in remediation services that are expected to occur after private investment in prevention.

See the UHI Lessons Learned paper, *Sustainable Funding for Program Strategies*⁷, for more information of the types of public funds the sites have been able to tap for their strategies, and the tactics they used to secure them. For this paper, the point is that change agents will be far more effective implementing strategies within a bureaucracy if they bring the funds needed to do so.

In city government in my experience you ask the appropriating entity for a budget, you get less than what you ask for and you make do with it. The staff at Safe and Sound have knowledge of resources and know ways of getting resources that we’ve been able to benefit from. We’re transitioning the Youth Violence Reduction Partnership from a federal grant to state money, and we’re making a pretty good case to the federal government that there should be dedicated federal funding for it. That’s not something we or any of our partner agencies would have been able to do on our own. So by bringing resources like that as well as the ownership of the need for systems change, Safe and Sound has been a Godsend.

– John Delaney, Deputy District Attorney, Philadelphia, and UHI Fellow

⁷ Available at www.urbanhealth.org

Although obtaining sustained public funding for their strategies is a major tactic, the UHI sites have also helped generate philanthropic dollars. This is particularly valuable for the “start up” phase of a new programmatic strategy.

To secure public and private grant funding for its strategies the sites in some instances have done the research into possible sources and undertaken the grant writing on behalf of their partner agencies; in others the sites have provided technical assistance to the agencies as they prepare their own grant proposals. Sometimes the sites have served as the convener that got multiple entities to unite and apply for a single grant, which often proved more attractive to the funder and resulted in more funding for the system as a whole.

Some sites went beyond helping agencies tap into existing grant funds, and approached the philanthropic community about increasing funding for youth health and safety issues.

We have someone working on grants within YVRP, but we don't have someone out actually talking to grant makers saying you need to create a funding stream so the District Attorney can tap into it. That's the kind of stuff that Safe and Sound does.”

– John Delaney, Deputy District Attorney, Philadelphia, and UHI Fellow

Help with Training Needs

In addition to money, another resource that change agents can bring is new knowledge and information – in other words, training. People will be more comfortable with and less resistant to change if they feel they have the knowledge and tools to incorporate the new way of operating into their workaday lives.

The sites took a variety of approaches to training, for example, direct training (such as Richmond's Reading Summit cosponsored by Youth Matters) or training via an entity fostered by the UHI site, such as The After School Institute that was created by Baltimore's Safe and Sound Campaign. Philadelphia Safe and Sound subcontracted child care training to the United Way, because of its existing expertise in that area.

The UHI lessons learned paper, *Developing Local Infrastructure: The Salience of Muddling Through*⁸, includes more discussion about the training function.

Troubleshoot and Do the Grunt Work

Yet another resource that UHI sites can provide is perhaps the rarest of all – *time*. This includes the time to think through and troubleshoot barriers to implementation, and the time to conduct the convening function.

Having the time to troubleshoot problems is particularly valuable when two systems are working together for the first time or in a new way. Some UHI sites have staff whose primary responsibility is to bring the middle and service levels of one bureaucracy into a new working relationship with their counterparts in another bureaucracy. They are like marriage counselors who broker the bureaucracies' new relationship, solving big and little problems involving space issues, union rules, paperwork matters, personality clashes and more.

⁸ Available at www.urbanhealth.org

Some discussions and issues are difficult, and they need to be facilitated. For example, people can only serve certain kids, or are funded for serving kids only in certain circumstances, so you have to facilitate solutions to those problems.

– Laura (Pinkney) Hewitt, former Executive Director, Safe Passages

It should be noted that not everyone agreed with the use of site staff for troubleshooting on behalf of the bureaucracies – the philosophy being that the bureaucracy should be able to deal with these issues itself, and paying site staff to do it is an unnecessary overhead expense. But the vast majority of those interviewed believe this is a very valuable use of the grant funding; without it the policy change would get bogged down in the implementation phase for lack of someone making sure all the “gears are greased.”

One of the selling points that Safe and Sound makes is that staff and management within agencies have to deal with the day-to-day and latest fires. It’s a matter of having these folks think, “Safe and Sound can think through these longer term but systemic things that I want to do but don’t have time to do.” Sometimes there is resistance to people saying I know what’s best, but one pitch that Safe and Sound makes is, “We know you know better, but we understand that you don’t have time to do it, so we will work with you to make it happen.” It’s not knowing better but offering the time and expertise to make it happen.

– Charlie Lyons, Acting President and CEO, Philadelphia Safe and Sound

Change agents also must have the time to do the support work – to set up meetings and otherwise make sure the conversations necessary to bring multiple systems together and solve the problems associated with that take place. For example, the UHI sites staffed the multi-level committee structures described previously.

The change agent takes on the responsibility of convening, doing the notes, contacting people, encouraging them. For many of these policy shifts, you need someone full time on the implementation. This new way of doing business just doesn’t come easily, it takes facilitation. That in and of itself is a responsibility and a position.

– Hathaway Ferebee, Executive Director, Baltimore’s Safe and Sound Campaign

It’s about having the capacity to staff and support the dialogue. One aspect is creating the platform where people can bring forward the new ideas and the research, and everyone is at the table to hear the same thing. The other part is the grimy business of getting all the partners there, calling the meetings. I don’t want to undervalue that, it’s just hard work identifying the people, finding new people, getting the right representation. It’s ongoing maintenance and often we as systems don’t have time to do it. We’re trying to manage what we have. Investing in an organization that can do that with us and for us is critical to pushing the bureaucracy.

– Andrea Youngdahl, Director, Department of Human Services, Oakland, and UHI Fellow

Think Long Term, and in Phases

Not surprisingly, everyone interviewed for this paper cited the length of time it takes to implement change within a bureaucracy. A change agent has to be prepared for this. Just as importantly, they have to be *perceived* as being prepared for this by those working within a system. A change agent viewed as committed to leaving an indelible mark on the city even if it takes several years will gain more respect, and ultimately, more cooperation from those within the system than a change agent working solely according to an elected official’s term of office.

Also, the length of time it takes to change a system can be broken into semi-distinct stages. Understanding and planning for the tactics needed during these different stages increases a change agent's effectiveness.

The first phase is to establish a goal that all agree with, and have everyone understand their roles up front. That's not sufficient, but many hurdles can be addressed by doing that. Then the next stage would be more emphasis on technical assistance and support – “We agreed to do this; are there any obstacles?” Put those on the table and problem-solve issues, such as needing a waiver to undertake a new way of providing services. This is a period of time spent seeing if it can work, to see what bugs need to be worked out. Finally it's about what sort of process outcomes are we getting – “Am I at the 25 kids I'm supposed to have?” Perhaps more structural problems emerge, and perhaps a new model is needed. Over time the role shifts from knowledge, information sharing and consensus building, then to real hands-on technical assistance and support, and then to more accountability.

– Laura (Pinkney) Hewitt, former Executive Director, Safe Passages

Spread the Credit Around

The UHI sites do almost all of their work behind the scenes, and they are happy to have the spotlight shine on those within government who are providing the services in new ways. Getting public recognition for those within the bureaucracy who are implementing the change and getting positive results is an important motivational tool. Recognition via the news media is particularly valuable for those working within government, because so often the message they receive from the broader public is that government just doesn't work well. The recognition helps people feel good about their work and it may speed the rate at which the change is adopted throughout the bureaucracy.

At first people generally from outside the system are coming in trying to get it to do something different. Later, people within the system can be identified as emissaries, indoctrinating others. The hardest part is attracting the first level of individuals. And when you start getting good results, and they become public, it almost becomes prestigious to be associated with the new strategy.

– Naomi Post, former President and CEO, Philadelphia Safe and Sound, and UHI Fellow

There is a caution regarding the advice to remain in the background: Eventually the UHI sites had to raise operating funds to replace the RWJF grant, and they needed their own “name recognition” to do so. By doing most of their work behind the scenes, some sites were not as visible to potential supporters as they otherwise would have been. It's been a difficult balancing act to shine the spotlight on others while developing a reputation for effectiveness.

Traits of an Effective Change Agent

Those interviewed for this paper were asked to list some traits, skills and areas of expertise that make a change agent effective in moving the bureaucracy. The commonly mentioned ones are:

1. Know and understand the bureaucracy – its mission, structure, operations, funding, personalities, and points of leverage. If at all possible, know those things from first-hand experience.

2. Be innovative and bring much expertise with regard to creating and tapping public funding streams at the local, state and federal levels.
3. Appreciate the workings of whole systems and value integrated service strategies.
4. Be diplomatic, easy to work with, and selfless with regard to the credit for accomplishments. Have a relationship with the bureaucracy and its workers that is based on mutual respect and trust.
5. Have the capacity and time to do the research and analysis with regard to data and best practices. Have a good sense of the importance of data and the ability to communicate how that should influence decisions.
6. Be creative in customizing feedback loops that ensure that input flows throughout the bureaucracy, top-to-bottom and bottom-to-top, and among bureaucracies working together in new ways.
7. Remember who the customer is. Be respectful that those working in the bureaucracy have the legal accountability for what happens.

Conclusion

In his book *Beyond Reengineering*⁹, Michael Hammer describes why “corporate dinosaurs” are so slow to change, even in the face of overwhelming evidence of the need to change. IBM, for example, saw Microsoft coming a mile away but still could not reform itself nimbly enough to respond satisfactorily to the challenge. These corporations couldn’t reform themselves because they had no organized means to do so; they were built for continuity. Change, according to Hammer, does not happen automatically. It requires the right mechanisms and processes.

Organizations, says Hammer, need two systems: a “surface system” and “deep system”. The surface system involves the organization’s regular tasks and processes, with the attendant jobs, structures, systems and values. The surface system periodically needs to change, and it is the deep system that accomplishes that change.

Hammer’s description of the deep system sounds very much like the role played by the UHI sites: “The deep system makes no products and delivers no services. Rather it monitors, governs, adjusts and reforms the surface system that creates the customer value. A company’s deep system bears the responsibility for detecting external changes, determining what those changes mean, and intervening to modify or transform the surface system accordingly. The deep system, working beneath the surface, embodies the capacity to change.”

Compare that description of a deep system with this one of a UHI site:

There needs to be someone above the fray that does not have day-to-day operational responsibilities, who isn’t captured by the crisis of the moment, who can help us think through our good intentions. I’m not talking about promoting the inevitable “appendage” programs; we cut those things off quickly. I’m talking about change strategies that need to be imbedded in the heart of institutions that have responsibility for delivering services. You need a group that thinks about how this gets accomplished. Organizations like Safe Passages are always thinking about these

⁹ Hammer, Michael. *Beyond Reengineering: How the Processed-Centered Organization is Changing Our Work and Our Lives*, HarperCollins, 1996, pp. 215-216.

types of challenges to make our services broader and more relevant.

– Chet Hewitt, Director, Alameda County Social Services Agency

Hammer argues that the deep system should be a permanent investment and show up on a company's financial statements with all vital operations. Public sector bureaucracies, however, are very unlikely to have the resources to permanently fund and house a deep system within itself. As one agency head put it, "When it's a choice between administrative capacity to think through and plan for and implement changes, or direct services, we will always have to invest in direct services." It is into this breach that the UHI experience suggests philanthropy could enter.

You cannot overstate the huge role that RWJF has played in giving these change agents operating money, and the role the UHI's National Program Office played in showing us possibilities for change. We would not have been able to secure accomplishments and increase optimism for the future if we had to raise our own operating funds, nor if we had not had the connections to new ideas that the NPO enabled us to have. This is one of the key fundamentals of this initiative that undergirds any success that any of us have had.

– Hathaway Ferebee, Executive Director, Baltimore's Safe and Sound Campaign

By funding the UHI sites, The Robert Wood Johnson Foundation created deep systems with the time, resources and expertise to think about long-term improvements rather than about immediate tasks. They were able to gather and analyze data and otherwise scan the environment for areas of potential improvement; seek best practices and share these ideas with the bureaucracies' surface systems; convene the conversations necessary to plan change strategies; troubleshoot problems along the way; and secure the necessary resources of all kinds on behalf of the public agencies. Proponents not so much of good government, but rather better and more effective government, might find cultivating and supporting the deep system function rather irresistible.

Appendix I

Seed for Baltimore's foster care reforms planted in visit to San Diego

From UHI Newsletter, *Helping Communities Work Smarter for Kids*, August 2005

In Baltimore, the Safe and Sound Campaign knew that the foster care system was ripe for reform. As important a service as foster care is, the system represented government's penchant for spending too much on the remediation of problems and too little on prevention and second chances. What Safe and Sound needed was a good, proven reform model that could be replicated in Baltimore.

Meanwhile, in San Diego, Judge James Milliken knew the highly-praised reforms of his county's foster care system that he helped pioneer could (and should) be replicated elsewhere. What he needed was access to civic leaders interested in improving foster care in their home areas.

When a delegation from Safe and Sound met Judge Milliken in January 2004, both parties knew they had found what they were looking for. Much hard work ensued, and in August 2005 Maryland Governor Robert Ehrlich and other civic leaders signed a compact that will bring San Diego's model to Baltimore.

Judge Milliken and the delegation from Baltimore's Safe and Sound Campaign met during an inter-city leadership visit (ICLV) sponsored by the Urban Health Initiative (UHI). The UHI has held several ICLVs, during which delegates from UHI's five campaigns in Baltimore, Detroit, Oakland, Philadelphia and Richmond visit a non-UHI city to learn about its systems change efforts. In addition to San Diego, other ICLV locales have been Chicago, Boston, Minneapolis and Kansas City.

"I don't know if we would have learned of the San Diego foster care model without the ICLV," said Hathaway Ferebee, executive director of Baltimore's Safe and Sound Campaign. "When we heard Judge Milliken describe it, we knew this was the perfect model to improve kids' chances, to get help for parents struggling with addiction, and to save money. We converged on Judge Milliken. He said he was interested in implementing the program in other cities, and we begged him to select Baltimore."

The replication in Baltimore of a successful reform in San Diego is an example of the positive connections that are made via the UHI's ICLVs. "In philanthropy lingo, it's called cross-site learning," said Charles Royer, the UHI's national program director. "We found that ICLVs are a very important piece of our effort to increase the knowledge and broaden the perspectives of key people in our cities. When you bring people together like this, they will uncover a nugget, a seed that can grow in their own backyard. In San Diego, here was Judge Milliken, a guy who knows very well the territory of improving conditions for foster kids. He could talk peer-to-peer to civic leaders in Baltimore, and overcome any difficulties resulting from differences between the two cities' circumstances."

In addition to making connections between leaders from different cities, ICLVs also strengthen relationships among civic leaders from the same city. "In an ICLV people spend a lot of time with colleagues from their own city, whom they might not know very well. The experience takes people out of the daily contexts of cell phones, email and the like," said Royer. "People have a common experience, and learn together about things that can work in their home cities."

The following individuals were interviewed for this UHI lessons learned paper. The author wishes to thank all interviewees for their time and insights.

Josefina Alvarado-Mena, Executive Director, Safe Passages, Oakland
Peter Beilenson, former Commissioner, Baltimore City Health Department
Susanne Crump, Vice President, United Way Services, Richmond
Cynthia Curreri, National Program Deputy Director, Urban Health Initiative
John Delaney, Deputy District Attorney, Philadelphia
Grenaé Dudley, Executive Director, Mayor's Time, Detroit
Hathaway Ferebee, Executive Director, Baltimore's Safe and Sound Campaign
Chet Hewitt, Director, Alameda County Social Services Agency
Laura Hewitt, former Executive Director, Safe Passages, Oakland
David Kears, Director, Alameda County Health Care Services Agency
Jo Ann Lawer, Consultant and former President and CEO, Philadelphia Safe and Sound
Charles Lyons, Acting President and CEO, Philadelphia Safe and Sound
Lynn McCashin, Executive Director, Youth Matters, Richmond
K. P. Pelleran, State Director, Fight Crime: Invest in Kids Michigan
Naomi Post-Street, Consultant and former President and CEO, Philadelphia Safe and Sound
Charles Royer, National Program Director, Urban Health Initiative
Andrea Youngdahl, Director, Department of Human Services, Oakland



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