



TRAINING OPPORTUNITIES

Bowling a 'Strike' on Social Capital

BY ELIZABETH DUNNING

The term “social capital” has a new polish, thanks to Robert Putnam’s book, *Bowling Alone: The Collapse and Revival of American Community*, but the ideas behind it – that people and their relationships influence their ability to effect change for themselves and their communities – have deep roots in the American community psyche.

In the book, according to *Booklist* magazine, Putnam laments the decline in informal social institutions, such as bowling leagues, parent associations and political groups, that once were the glue for many American communities. He examines how

developed in partnership with the Urban Institute. More than 40 participants assembled for the full-day event.

The symposium was designed to translate the theory and jargon surrounding the current policy discussion of social capital into tools useful for community development practitioners. It was offered as “an opportunity,” according to Mark Robinson, a Neighborhood Reinvestment training consultant who was one of the symposium’s developers, “to learn both from practitioners who have made social capital work in their communities, and also from theorists

Mark Robinson, training consultant for Neighborhood Reinvestment Corporation and one of the symposium’s developers, talks about the practical applications of the game with some of the participants.

PHOTO BY SÉAN BENNETT



Americans have expended their “social capital,” the good will and social intercourse that constitute basic neighborliness, to such an extent that they now feel civic malaise despite economic prosperity.

As *Bowling Alone* joined the best-seller list, more and more people began talking about social capital. What is it? What does it mean for community-based work? How can the theory discussed by Putnam and others become an actionable strategy for a community?

In response, the Neighborhood Reinvestment Training Institute in San Francisco convened a symposium, “The Power of Social Networks to Change Neighborhoods.” The symposium was

who understand its principles and applications.”

Beginning with a theoretical discussion of social capital to lay the foundation and make the terminology clear, the symposium moved on into a neighborhood-dynamics exercise, discussion and a case study to make the theory applicable to community-based organizations.

Making the Theory Real

Avis Vidal, chair of the Department of Geography and Urban Planning at Wayne State University, led off the symposium and laid the groundwork for the day. Formerly a principle research investigator at the Urban Institute, Vidal

defined social capital as “the value contained in trusting, reciprocal relationships.” In relating this definition to the practical work of community development, she stressed that there are “some relationships that provide social support [which] helps individuals ‘get by’ [while] others provide social leverage that helps them ‘get ahead.’”¹

According to Vidal, community developers must emphasize the “development of social capital that helps the community to ‘get ahead.’” Focusing on those relationships better aids a neighborhood to advocate for its own vision, making the community proactive, instead of reactive, she said.

Neighborhood-Dynamics Exercise

Following Vidal, symposium participants were divided into three groups for a neighborhood-dynamics exercise, developed by a team of Training Institute staff. The game was designed to “allow you to step into a role in a community and experience the value of social capital ... Most importantly, playing the game warms up your mind for fruitful discussions of neighborhood dynamics,” said Lynsey Wood of Neighborhood Reinvestment, one of the game’s creators.

Each player was given an identity card that included – for the game – the neighborhood they lived in and their individual values – things like public safety, community property values, or diversity – as well as the number of financial and social capital dollars they were able to spend. Each neighborhood was also given a number of community dollars, which acted as a rough proxy for the neighborhood’s “financial worth,” and a number of social and civic organizations.

Participants then played the game – choosing whether to pay to join organizations, and how much of their individual capital they were willing to spend on a series of community items up for bid. As opportunities like a recreation center or a commercial development were auctioned off, participants used their individual and group resources to bid on their community’s future. Attracting opportunities and avoiding challenges, like a waste-treatment plant, for example, each group saw its amount of community dollars change.

Michael Collins, an analyst with the NeighborWorks® Campaign for Home Ownership, facilitated one of the group sessions. He said a lesson for his group was that “potentially, the neighborhood which lacks financial resources can, relative to the other neighborhoods, do pretty well if they rally their social capital.”

Simply put, the game was an exercise in valuing social capital – in particular, the networks among individuals and the organizations in their community – as a powerful tool for shaping community vision and change.

In a discussion following the game, participants shared differing views of the zero-sum bidding process, and what “winning” might mean in this kind of exercise. They noted that the argument could be made that the poorest community, in fact, “won,” by blocking a new community challenge or attracting a potential opportunity.

Case Study

The day concluded with a discussion of social networks and organizing as seen “on the ground.” The group watched clips from the film “Holding Ground” which details the inception of the Dudley Street Neighborhood Initiative (DSNI) and discusses the community’s translation of its social and civic capital into political influence and change.

Afterward, John Barros, the current executive director of DSNI, and Gus Newport, a former DSNI executive director, presented their own theories and strategies for successfully using organizing and social capital as tools for community change.

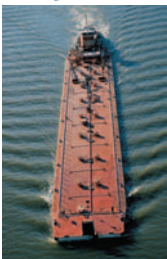
With that conversation, the concept of social capital – whether it is noticed in the bowling alley, in a church basement, or on a street corner – became tangible. The symposium brought participants from principle to action – with every step in between. ■

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¹As quoted from Vidal’s overhead slides. In them, she footnotes Xavier de Souza Briggs, “Brown Kids in White Suburbs: Housing Mobility and the Many Faces of Social Capital.” *Housing Policy Debate*, vol. 9, no. 1, 1998.

BY SALLY DIGGES

Setting a Future Course for Community Development



Experienced community-development practitioners have few places to go for continuing education and development. Neighborhood Reinvestment's Training Institutes, like others in the field, focus primarily on meeting the critical needs of newcomers and those seeking a foundation in the field. Most executive development programs are offered to leaders from many walks of life. These courses help develop generic leadership and related skills, but are disconnected from a specific field of work.

In response, Neighborhood Reinvestment is developing a series of educational programs especially for senior community-development professionals, such as executive directors of NeighborWorks® organizations. As with training institutes, however, at least half the participants are expected to come from outside the NeighborWorks® system. The initiative, called the Advanced Practitioner Platform, will gather experienced and thoughtful practitioners committed to setting a future course for community development.

Building from the strengths of Neighborhood Reinvestment Training Institutes, the Advanced Practitioner Platform (APP) meets a profound, three-part challenge facing the community development field. As envisioned, it:

- ▶ Offers experienced professionals an orchestrated series of programs for professional growth and development;
- ▶ Brings practitioners together with the explicit purpose of identifying and implementing strategies to reshape the future of the community development field; and
- ▶ Demands, uniquely in the leadership development field, that participants define and achieve assessable performance outcomes for themselves, their organizations, and the field.

APP identifies and meets the comprehensive professional development needs of experienced practitioners, and then challenges them to make specific, constructive differences. APP provides a one-of-a-kind platform to develop practitioners and significantly increase their effectiveness.

Core Programs

Once completely operational, APP will encompass four programs: New Directions,

Learning Communities, Contemporary Issues, and Advanced Clinics.

New Directions: This program, developed with Harvard University's Hauser Center for Nonprofit Organizations, will fundamentally change the way participants conduct business. It will prepare carefully selected professionals for the thinking and skill development required to advance their organizations to the next level. The focus initially will be on executive directors of successful organizations with 10 or more years of experience willing to:

- ▶ Identify and take on a specific and critical challenge confronting their respective organizations; and
- ▶ Commit the time and effort required for learning and success.

With support from Harvard coaching and technical assistance from a variety of sources, the APP series will bring lessons and techniques from other fields to the challenges of the small, extremely complex organizations that characterize the community development field. This series is expected to:

- ▶ Significantly improve the impact of these organizations in communities around the country;
- ▶ Identify new ways to address some of the challenges facing many community-based organizations as they mature;
- ▶ Identify institutional barriers that constrain increased growth and impact in community development; and
- ▶ Chart a course for community-based corporations for the next 10 years.

Unlike other community development programs, APP will require participants to shape and focus their efforts on challenges that can make a difference in their organizations, the field, and themselves. Participants will establish goals and hold themselves accountable for achieving them. Thus, "training" actually becomes each participant's effort to advance his or her own work.

Learning Communities: APP will ask each class of practitioners attending the New Directions program to seed and/or expand a series of Learning Communities. Interested participants in the Advanced Clinics and Contemporary Issues programs will be invited to join such communities, as well as people from the field who have



not yet attended an APP program. Each Learning Community will be constructed around shared challenges, topics, or aspirations, and will use groupware, communications and other information technology to keep participants in touch with one another, and to enable them to identify and move forward on agreed upon agendas.

Contemporary Issues: While content will evolve, the intent of this program is to provide learning and development opportunities in conjunction with executive development programs at high-level academic institutions. Illustrative hot topics might include managing growth and change for sustainability; planning your exit strategy; neighborhood revitalization as market share; and mergers and alliances in community development.

Advanced Clinics: These courses will focus on specific technical skill development in a short, concentrated manner. Typically, these one- or two-day courses will be offered at Neighborhood Reinvestment's Training Institutes. Participants will be expected to bring specific problems to be solved and will be contacted ahead of time to submit their problems or issues.

Organization and Resources

The full APP will be built over the next two and one-half years in three stages:

- ▶ Designing and conducting the inaugural New Directions program, including establishing Learning Communities. Neighborhood Reinvestment and Harvard University have begun the design and research for this program. The first 45 directors will begin the series in August 2002.
- ▶ Experimenting with contemporary issues and advanced clinics. Neighborhood Reinvestment has begun the development of an advanced course on neighborhood revitalization to be offered in 2002. It is also in the process of identifying additional topics, matching institutions, and preparing the content for two additional courses to be offered in 2003. At least one Advanced Clinic is being offered in 2002, with four more scheduled for delivery in 2003.
- ▶ Moving to full implementation, by 2004 Neighborhood Reinvestment expects to offer the second New Directions series, four Contemporary Issues courses at various institutions, and five Advanced Clinics at training institutes.

APP has chosen to begin with the New Directions program because of its centrality to the overall aspiration of APP and its connection to the Learning Communities. In addition, APP believes that much of the key subject matter for Contemporary Issues and Advanced Clinics will emerge from the New Directions program.

The Principles of APP

When fully operational, APP programs will be guided by the following principles:

- ▶ Seed the next round of community-development advancements in the community-based development industry;
- ▶ Offer various courses in a variety of formats;
- ▶ Draw on the knowledge of professionals both in and outside the field;
- ▶ Center curriculum content around participants in an effort to help them advance professionally;
- ▶ Provide follow-up and support so that principles and practices are applied beyond training sessions;
- ▶ Evaluate the impact of the courses;
- ▶ Use peer-to-peer learning and networking as fundamental pieces of all courses; and
- ▶ Develop criteria and standards for each course and for the program in general.

Initial Outcomes

Neighborhood Reinvestment expects the combination of experienced peers, well-designed, targeted course work, cutting-edge research, consulting, and the establishment of ongoing Learning Communities to produce the following outcomes from the 200 participants within the next three years:

- ▶ At least 80 percent of those who attend the New Directions program will set and achieve specific outcomes of critical importance to their organizations;
- ▶ Each class of practitioners at the New Directions program will identify and make measurable progress toward at least one challenge confronting the field at large;
- ▶ Every year, at least one Learning Community will be established, or a previously established Learning Community enhanced and expanded;
- ▶ More than 75 percent of those attending Contemporary Issues and Advanced Clinics programs will demonstrate competency of the subject matter in follow-up evaluation efforts;
- ▶ More than 80 percent of those attending Contemporary Issues and Advanced Clinics programs will use knowledge gained in an identifiable manner related to specified challenges; and
- ▶ Over the next three to five years, the New Directions program and the Learning Communities will develop and disseminate a series of insights and frameworks that will demonstrably shift the nature and content of the community development field. ■

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BY GARY ASKEROTH

The special spirit of aloha, the signature Hawaiian greeting and farewell, permeated a Neighborhood Reinvestment Community Leadership Institute in Honolulu that had many participants “walking on air,” in the words of David Nakamura, executive director of the **Mutual Housing Association of Hawaii**, one of the producers.

More than 120 participating resident leaders and staff explored many facets of community leadership during two days of workshops and general sessions. The institute was produced by Neighborhood Reinvestment’s Pacific district and MHA of Hawaii.

Aside from its location, the event was unique in other ways as well:

- ▶ All but a few of the community leaders were members of one NeighborWorks® organization, MHA of Hawaii (MHAH); and
- ▶ Most of the instructors were Pacific district staff.

Designing the CLI

Pam Bender, former Resident Leadership Initiative director, and I went to Hawaii last July to begin the process of designing the Hawaii CLI. MHAH leaders and staff helped us organize focus groups, both on Kauai, for Lihue Court Townhomes leaders, and Oahu, for leaders from Kekaulike Courtyards and Palolo Valley Homes. Bender asked each group to describe what is and is not working well in their communities and organizations, and what skills they wanted training in to help overcome their challenges.

At the Lihue meeting, for example, the group brought up conflicts between residents and staff over property maintenance standards, policies and procedures. The result was a CLI workshop, “How To Improve Collaboration Between Residents and Property Management Staff.” Since this was a specialized topic, we engaged Glenn L. French, a specialist in real estate management consulting and training, to design and teach the workshop. French is a Neighborhood Reinvestment Training Institute and Institute of Real Estate Management

‘Walking on Air’ at a Community Leadership Institute in Hawaii

Photos by Séan Bennett



MHAH had asked the Pacific district to offer a Community Leadership Institute (CLI) in Honolulu because many Hawaiian resident leaders cannot get to the mainland for training, and the available island-based training is not designed to produce strong leaders in resident-controlled nonprofits.

“Hawaii’s affordable housing communities are challenged,” says Nakamura, “with dwindling public financial support and a weak economy.” MHAH and its resident leaders are taking bold steps to overcome these challenges, including a dramatic offer to take over a troubled, 306-unit, public housing development in Honolulu, called Palolo Valley Homes.

The conversion of Palolo Valley Homes into a mutual housing community was well-underway as we planned and delivered the Hawaii Community Leadership Institute. Among the resident leaders, in fact, who helped us design it was Dahlia Asuega, president of the Palolo Tenants Association.

instructor, with previous training experience in Hawaii. In the workshop itself, most of the participants, somewhat surprisingly, were staff, rather than residents.

At the closing general session, French reflected on his experience: “I am very impressed with the work you are doing here through mutual housing. Compared with 20 years ago, the housing stock still has problems, and affordability is still a big challenge, but the intelligence of the people here is impressive. You have the human resources and the attitude to achieve the big tasks you have set for yourselves.”

Highlights with Aloha

Of the many highlights of the institute, perhaps the high level of commitment and joy of the participants is the winner. As Pacific District Director Margaret Frisbee recalls: “I was impressed by the openness of people to learn, the appreciation of everything we did, the humor, and the richness of culture.”



Other highlights:

- ▶ The opening ceremony, led by Puna Dawson, resident services manager at Lihue Court Townhomes, was both emotional and educational. As Dawson poured water from three small bowls into a large Koa bowl, she explained that this represented the beginning of a new mingling of the efforts and ideas of the three mutual housing communities.
- ▶ Maria Garciaz, executive director of Salt Lake NHS, shared her experiences as a woman of color who overcame obstacles both external and self-imposed to become a community leader.
- ▶ James Johnson led an enjoyable wrap-up session in which participants testified about their learning. Many people cast aside their normal shyness and shared their thoughts. This informal sharing was preceded by a more formal process of reports from each workshop on their lessons learned.
- ▶ The registration process, itself, took the combined efforts of Joni Tayama of MHAH; LaRhonda Mobley, Dora Wellington and me of the district office; and Thao Sperling from Washington, D.C., to figure out how to use InterAction in allocating more than 120 people among 18 workshops, while spelling names from numerous Asian and Pacific Islander origins.
- ▶ Séan Bennett's knockout event-ending show packed more flora and fauna into a few minutes than anyone could ever have expected. Good it required no narrator, since Séan had stayed up all night to produce his masterpiece.

Will the Learning Persist?

Trainers and learners alike often wonder what the long-term impact of training will be. We asked a few community leaders and staff what had changed for them as a result of the Hawaii CLI:

- ▶ "It's been an emotional moment for us at Palolo," Dahlia Asuega reflects, "to attend this conference and have other people see the same picture of community building that we have been struggling with for so long, under the state's housing authority. If we at Palolo could tell our story we would say 'give us tools, not handouts; government needs to work with us, not against us; listen to our voices, so you can envision our dreams.'"
- ▶ Quintin D'Agirbaud, resident services coordinator at Kekeaulike Courtyards remembers a "wonderful training. I have had several residents who'd left our committees rejoin them with new energy."
- ▶ Puna Dawson believes, "The wealth that came to us from Neighborhood Reinvestment to pay for this training will be repaid over and over again in this community. Having residents train with staff strengthened the bond between them."
- ▶ Resident leader Melva Gonsalves felt the CLI was very good for the community, "especially the single moms who learned how to improve their money management," and Jennifer Jack has seen "a lot more new people coming out."
- ▶ Lihue Court staffer Soi Soi Tan says that after the CLI the resident council members "are no longer inhibited in speaking out."

Resident leaders at Kekaulike Courtyards also were pleased with the impact of the CLI on their volunteer work in their

Chinatown community. Calvin Chee, for example, has tried to implement some of the motivation skills he learned, starting with the focus on discovering the hopes, fears and desires of his neighbors.

Xiaosha Lu, a Kekaulike social services staffer, liked the visual symbols that she learned to use: The pyramid of human needs has been helpful in reminding her that many residents are concerned about basic needs, helping her focus her social service planning. She also found the leadership-skills workshop helpful, where she discovered her "Bear" nature. Participants in this workshop received a book by John Maxwell, *The 21 Indispensable Qualities of a Leader*, that helps leaders focus on and celebrate their strongest skills.

Maile Lee, resident monitor of the Kekaulike Computer Learning Center, says the CLI was great in that it expanded her networking into the wider community.

"The residents from each of our properties," said David Nakamura of MHAH, "came away re-energized and committed to making a difference in their communities. The empowerment and pride they gained had them walking on air." ■

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DEVELOPING A CLI CURRICULUM

For the Hawaii Community Leadership Institute, we mailed a survey to more than 100 residents of the three MHAH communities, asking them to rank their top workshop choices. The responses confirmed the curriculum outline we had developed, based on focus-group meetings. We decided to offer 18 half-day workshops in 15 skill areas, with the top three to be repeated.

Below is an outline of the curriculum:

- ▶ **Developing Your Leadership Potential**, Michael Gabriel and Carilee Warner
- ▶ **Speaking with Confidence**, Pam Bender
- ▶ **Resolving Conflicts in Communities**, Joe Gonzales
- ▶ **Show Me the Money**, Richard Castro
- ▶ **Resident Councils in Multifamily Developments**, Inman Rouse and James Johnson
- ▶ **How To Improve Collaboration Between Residents and Property Management Staff**, Glenn French
- ▶ **Communication Skills**, Joe Gonzales and Carilee Warner
- ▶ **Listening to the Voice of Youth**, Maria Garciaz
- ▶ **Keeping People Motivated**, Gary Askerooth
- ▶ **Making Meetings Work**, Mary Clark
- ▶ **Demystifying Your Community's Budget and Finances**, Glenn French
- ▶ **Team-Building Skills**, James Johnson
- ▶ **Getting on Line – Using Computers To Benefit Your Organization**, Bob Stone
- ▶ **Improving Personal Credit and Family Assets**, Donna Wright