

The Annie E. Casey Foundation

"We have three purposes for evaluation," says Tom Kelly, Evaluation Director of the Annie E. Casey Foundation, *"Learning in real-time, building the capacity of our grantees and the communities we invest in, and influencing policy and practice."* Over the past 10 years, the Foundation has developed an approach to evaluation that is unique in its focus on building the capacity of communities to use data and other evaluative information strategically in order to effect change.

The Casey Foundation's *Making Connections* initiative is a ten-year effort to improve outcomes for families and children in tough or isolated neighborhoods in such cities as Denver, Des Moines, Hartford, Milwaukee, and Oakland. This neighborhood strengthening initiative has six core result areas that the Foundation seeks to influence, each with specific and measurable goals. A selection of the indicators used to track progress towards the desired result are listed below:

1. Families have increased earnings and income
 - number and percentage of parents and young adults employed and retained in the workforce
 - number and percentage of parents employed in jobs that provide family supporting wages/benefits and opportunities for career advancement
2. Families have increased levels of assets
 - number and percentage of families whose savings increase
 - number and percentage of families who own their own homes
3. Children are healthy and ready to succeed in school
 - number and percentage of children with early childhood education experiences
 - number and percentage of elementary school attendance rates
4. Families, youth and neighborhoods increase their civic participation
 - number and percentage of eligible adults who register and vote
 - number and percentage of residents who assume community leadership roles
5. Families and neighborhoods have strong informal supports and networks
 - number and percentage of families who are connected to informal helping networks
6. Families have access to quality services and supports that work for them
 - number and percentage of families indicating satisfaction with the effectiveness, responsiveness and trustworthiness of agencies and organizations



In each site, Casey has enlisted the help of Local Learning Partners (LLPs), local entities or consortiums, to develop the specific outcomes and to assist with data collection. LLPs are often unconventional alliances that bring traditional data sources and users together with front-line service workers and residents.

LLPs act as on-the-ground evaluators and data collectors for the Foundation, but they are also the community members who will spur and sustain change and hold providers accountable after Foundation funding has ceased. As Kelly notes, *"We need to bring the consumers into the change process because they are the ones who can continue the demand for outcomes and results after the Casey funding ends."*

The collection of common data across sites has enabled Casey to identify best practices more easily. As Frank Farrow, Director of *Making Connections* says, *"Our intent is to extract the best from each site and share that wisdom – not only among other sites, but also with the larger field of community change."*

To assist in this collection of data, Casey funded the Chapin Hall Center for Children to develop the online National Survey Indicators Database. Designed to help users find survey questions, measures and instruments that can contribute to their own data collection activities, the online database is organized around eight domains that closely relate to the goals of *Making Connections*. Within each domain, users can click through to reach specific indicators and sources of data.

For example, site teams in Des Moines initially recruited and paid local residents to help collect their neighborhood data and also emphasized that residents "owned" the data. The "give back" has been especially important and they have done this in various ways, through the production of a small booklet with interesting findings from the survey, called, "Through the Eyes of Residents," and through frequent small, neighborhood-level meetings to present and share information and plan for action.

Among other results, this community data gathering exercise led residents to unite around the issue of predatory lending. The community mobilized behind the issue and, with assistance from the Casey Foundation, was able to use community-level data to put pressure on lenders. More than 30 Des Moines families have now recovered \$2.5 million from four predatory lenders. In addition, the task force has helped pass a statewide disclosure law. The effective display and strategic use of this community-level data was critical to effecting larger change in Des Moines.

Tom Kelly stresses that involving and empowering the community itself is the most critical element of the entire initiative. *"Casey's interventions can only go so far, and the benefits we bring won't be sustainable unless the community can hold the service providers accountable and, in order to do so, they need to be able to track outcomes."*

The Annie E. Casey Foundation

- \$2.9 billion assets in 2005
- Awarded \$221 million in grants in 2005
- Established in 1948, the primary mission of the Foundation is to foster public policies, human services reforms, and community supports that more effectively meet the needs of today's vulnerable children and families
- 32 FTEs with 2 evaluation/knowledge management staff

