



SOCIAL POLICY RESEARCH  
ASSOCIATES

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## Evaluation of the Community Leadership Project

**2011 Evaluation Progress Report**  
Executive Summary

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## Executive Summary

The Community Leadership Project (CLP) is a collaborative effort to strengthen the leadership and organizational capacities of small organizations serving low-income people and communities of color in the San Francisco Bay Area, Central Coast, and San Joaquin Valley. With funding from the David and Lucile Packard Foundation, the James Irvine Foundation, and the William and Flora Hewlett Foundation, 27 well-established intermediary organizations—community foundations, grantmaking public charities, and funder affinity groups—engage in three distinct but related strategies to enhance the capacity of community-based organizations to improve the lives of those who live in the communities they serve:<sup>1</sup>

- **Regranting.** Twelve intermediaries provide organizations with multi-year core financial support and tailored organizational development assistance and coaching.
- **Providing technical assistance.** Six intermediaries provide organizations with targeted trainings and technical assistance in key organizational development areas.
- **Developing leadership capacity.** Ten intermediaries provide the executive directors and other leaders of organizations with leadership development programs.

Together, these three strategies are intended to build community organizations' adaptive capacity, leadership capacity, operational/management capacity, programmatic capacity, and community/collaborative capacity.

Initial measurements of community organizations' capacities, using the My Healthy Organization survey, indicate that CLP community grantees hold great potential to benefit from investments in capacity building. They have clearly articulated intentions around planning, program design, and organizational structure, but lack consistent and formal practices for maximizing organizational capacity. Their initial capacity scores fall below those that would be indicative of highly developed organizations. (See Attachment A)

Social Policy Research Associates (SPR) and Leadership Learning Community serve as the evaluators of the Community Leadership Project. This document summarizes the first evaluation report, which identifies promising strategies for capacity building of small and mid-sized organizations and documents the preliminary impact of CLP on leaders, organizations, intermediaries, and foundation partners.

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<sup>1</sup> As of Fall 2011, more than 100 community-based organizations have received multi-year core support and tailored organizational development assistance and coaching within the regranting strategy. The average regrant amount received by community organizations is \$33,894 over two or three years. In addition, approximately 330 participants have received targeted trainings and technical assistance in key organizational development areas, and more than 280 leaders have participated in leadership development programs with deep experience working with leaders of color.

## Regranting to Community Organizations

The regranting strategy represents the greatest area of CLP investment. Approximately \$7 million, or 70 percent of total CLP resources, is invested in low-income communities in three California regions through the resources awarded to the 12 regranting intermediaries.

In recruiting potential community grantees, almost all regrantors leveraged pre-existing relationships with community organizations; at the same time, many also prioritized reaching new and untested organizations, particularly smaller, grassroots organizations working on the “cutting edge.” To mitigate the risk of granting to organizations that have not had many prior relationships with funders, regrantors considered the recommendations of advisory groups, assessed the readiness of potential grantees, and implemented selection criteria related to financial status and baseline organizational characteristics. In selecting their grantees, three-quarters of regrantors explicitly considered the extent to which organizations would serve and assist specific populations.

In their work with selected grantees, most regrantors are focusing on two or three areas of capacity building. The most common areas of focus are leadership capacity and operational capacity. Nearly all regrantors blend core operating support and direct technical assistance, with the latter often involving coaching during the application process and developing individualized capacity-building or technical assistance plans. In carrying out their work with their community grantees, all regrantors engage external consultants and almost all offer opportunities for grantees to come together via group trainings, peer sharing, collaborative planning, or networking.

In all three regions—but particularly in the San Joaquin Valley—some regrantors find that their ability to implement various modes of capacity building suffers from a lack of geographically and culturally appropriate resources (e.g., consultants and tools that reflect geographical/cultural/organizational context). The San Joaquin Valley also suffers from a fundamental lack of funding resources.

Overall, relationships between regrantors and community grantees are characterized by high levels of engagement. This high level of engagement can be attributed to regrantors using hands-on and “in the trenches” approaches with grantees, implementing a range of non-traditional, culturally mindful funding practices, acknowledging biases within mainstream philanthropy that sometimes work against smaller organizations serving low-income communities, and recognizing the power differentials inherent in funder-grantee relationships. As much as community grantees appear to benefit from these engaged relationships, they require significant resources that can burden the regranting intermediaries.

Looking across CLP regranting activities, we see a number of principles being practiced and developed that hold promise for enhancing capacity building within low-income communities:

- Strike a balance between giving community grantees broad and customized support.
- Be flexible and adaptable enough to “meet grantees where they are,” both culturally and organizationally.
- Move away from outcome-driven expectations and become more comfortable with a non-linear grantmaking and implementation process.
- Allow grantee self-determination but give realistic levels of direction.

- Flip the deficit-based orientation of capacity building on its head by switching to an asset-based orientation; always question assumptions about who holds expertise.
- Focus on building “organizational social capital.”

At this stage in the evaluation, it is too early to measure the outcomes of the regranting strategy. However, CLP regrantors are reporting exciting examples of how CLP investments are making a difference. As a result of work conducted so far, a number of CLP community grantees now have new or strengthened leadership, have begun difficult conversations with their boards, or have new organizational systems in place to support fiscal and technological management. Some community grantees have intensified their focus on strategic planning and visioning and others have piloted new microenterprise or fund-development innovations to creatively sustain their work. CLP resources have been transformative for at least three organizations that were previously operated out of homes or cars and now have dedicated office and meeting space to better serve their clients. As a result of their involvement in CLP, community grantees overall appear to be better positioned to serve their communities through strengthened outreach and programming, authentic partnerships, and meaningful investments in leadership development.

## **Providing Technical Assistance to Community Organizations**

CLP provided \$1.4 million to six intermediary organizations to provide targeted technical assistance (TA) to community organizations serving low-income people and communities of color in the three priority regions. The intermediaries selected have established track records, existing ties to community organizations, and approaches that embrace cultural competence. Their missions are generally well aligned with that of CLP.

Technical assistance intermediaries selected participant organizations they believed were in a position to immediately apply the lessons gleaned from technical assistance. Although they believed that a certain level of capacity was necessary for an organization to be in this state of “readiness,” they were also careful not to require too much initial capacity. This approach allowed intermediaries to challenge their own assumptions about “capacity,” to be more inclusive and to help organizations use the TA to leapfrog to a new level of effectiveness.

Some TA intermediaries provide support in only one capacity area, whereas others provide support in multiple capacity areas. The former are able to reach more organizations and provide a more focused “touch.” So far, TA intermediaries are placing less focus on programmatic, adaptive, and community/collaborative capacity than they are on leadership and operational capacity.

TA intermediaries use a variety of different strategies to build participants’ capacity, including workshops, participant convenings, individualized assistance, cohorts, and mini-grants. TA strategies vary considerably in their intensity, from one-time workshops to intensive cohort models, with most intermediaries using multiple strategies. In general, TA intermediaries work to arrive at a mix of strategies that will meet organizations’ needs while not overwhelming them. The cohort model used by four of the TA intermediaries, designed to support peer sharing and relationship building between like-minded organizations over time, appears to have particular value in the context of the CLP initiative.

In working with small grassroots organizations in under-resourced communities, TA intermediaries have noted that cultural competence depends on following a number of principles:

- Develop a knowledge of and a sensitivity to regional characteristics and culture.
- Show humility, engage in self-reflection, and have a willingness to learn.
- Be as flexible and adaptable as possible, particularly when going into new communities or when working with new constituencies.
- Recognize that diversity encompasses culture, gender, and ideology as well as race or skin color.

## **Developing the Leadership of Community Organizations**

CLP provided \$1.77 million to ten intermediaries to provide leadership development supports to leaders working in small- to medium-sized nonprofits serving low-income communities and communities of color in the three target regions. The support offered under this strategy varies considerably. Some intermediaries offer formal leadership training programs they have tested and refined over a number of years; others provide retreats, customized coaching, or workshops.

Eight of the leadership programs are reaching leaders in the chronically underserved San Joaquin Valley, in part by leveraging their local alumni networks to recruit participants. Several programs have expanded their recruitment of non-native English speakers by making materials available in Spanish and making their trainings more culturally relevant. Some programs are finding that the economy and its attendant financial stresses are making it difficult for leaders of color to commit to participating in leadership development programs.

All of the leadership programs are focusing on strengthening the leadership capacities of individual leaders, as opposed to those of organizations as a whole. Some of the programs make leadership sustainability a high priority, helping leaders of color sustain themselves in their work by balancing work and home life, attaining skill mastery, and developing peer support networks. Several programs use cultural competency as a core organizing principle integrated in everything they do, while others treat cultural competency as an element of the curriculum. Although enhanced advocacy and systems-change capacities are not intended outcomes of CLP, more than half the programs address issues of empowerment, advocacy, and social change.

Because nearly all leadership development programs offer single year curricula and have “graduated” at least one cohort, we can report a few preliminary outcomes of the leadership development strategy based on collection of survey data in the areas of leadership, personal sustainability, cultural competency, collaboration/network capacity, and advocacy and systems change capacity:

- The programs that are developing practices for personal sustainability in ways that are culturally relevant and responsive are demonstrating the most significant impact. These programs use a variety of methods including diverse cohorts, reflection retreats, circle dialogues, and peer support networks that last well beyond the end of the program. Combining these supports appears to result in transformative effects for leadership participants
- The programs that emphasize community dialogue, community organizing, and movement building show promising outcomes around collaboration, networking, advocacy, and systems change capacity. The power of connecting across cultural differences in deep and meaningful ways shows promising transformative effects for leaders.

Overall, five leadership programs had outcome survey data available, and the outcomes for these programs are very positive, especially in the areas of personal sustainability and leadership. It is also important to note that CLP has provided an unprecedented opportunity for leaders of color in the San Joaquin Valley to build their leadership capacity. In order to sustain these leaders during tough economic times, CLP may want to consider ways of helping graduates of these multiple leadership programs network with one another so that they can continue building the social capital that is so critical for personal sustainability and community benefit.

## Cross-Cutting Themes in Initiative Implementation

A review across the regranting, technical assistance, and leadership development strategies allows for a distillation of key cross-cutting themes in the areas of recruitment, focus of capacity building, cultural competency, and progress.

- **Intermediaries used similar criteria for gauging grantee/participant suitability for CLP.** Intermediaries from all three strategies used criteria based on the organization’s financial stability, other organizational characteristics, whether the organization was led by people of color, and/or its content focus to determine if a potential grantee organization or program participant was aligned with CLP goals and ready to benefit. It is unclear to what extent these organizational characteristics are effective predictors of success.
- **Both regranting and technical assistance intermediaries are focusing on building the leadership and operational capacities of community grantees and giving less attention to building programmatic, adaptive, and community/collaborative capacity.** To some extent, these capacity-building foci are expected because it is assumed that service-driven grassroots organizations need less support on how to operate programs or engage their communities.
- **To be culturally competent, intermediaries are finding that the key word is flexibility.** Intermediaries find that flexibility and adaptability are what allow them to best meet grantees/participants “where they are” and to tailor their approaches accordingly (e.g., allowing grantees to engage in storytelling rather than report-writing, facilitating webinars rather than in-person convenings that require travel in the vast San Joaquin Valley, or finding a Hmong participant a training approach that is more culturally appropriate than peer coaching).
- **Intermediaries’ approach to cultural competence indicates a broadening of the concept to encompass working with diverse organizational and geographical cultures.** CLP intermediaries are just as likely to speak about cultural competence in terms of working with the cultures of small grassroots organizations and with the different cultures of places or regions as they are to speak of it in terms of race and ethnicity. They also introduce the additional dimensions of gender and ideological diversity. While this broader definition of diversity and cultural competence has some undeniable benefits, it also has implications for whether CLP is explicitly addressing important race-based issues facing community grantees.
- **The current economic climate is hindering learning and progress across the three strategies.** The recessionary economy and its associated effects on government spending, supportive programs, and philanthropic giving are placing



considerable stress on community organizations and their leaders. Concerned with “putting out fires” and merely surviving, leaders struggle to participate in leadership programs or more intensive TA/training models and cannot devote as much time and energy as they might want to capacity building.

- **A shortage of resources in the San Joaquin Valley has affected implementation and progress.** Intermediaries across all strategies note the shortage of capacity-building resources in the San Joaquin Valley, as reflected even by the lack of a regular physical presence of CLP intermediaries in the region to conduct recruitment and provide training. Intermediaries have responded in varying ways to the resource shortage, developing specialized resources, joining forces with other CLP intermediaries, and emphasizing peer sharing and relationship building.

## Initiative-level Outcomes to Date

While there are limitations on what we can report at this mid-point, there are early indications that CLP’s investments are making meaningful changes on the ground with individual leaders and organizations.

Interviews with the intermediaries and the CLP funders show that CLP is having very strong impacts at the initiative level. Despite experiencing some challenges related to staff capacity, resources, and geography, most of the intermediaries are able to cite specific examples of how their participation in CLP has affected them positively.

Intermediaries report expanded awareness of the different types of organizations in different regions, a deeper understanding of the multiple challenges that community grantees face, increased commitment to addressing structural barriers and using multi-level competency frameworks, and a commitment to building stronger capacity-building networks and infrastructures in the three regions. Furthermore, the intermediaries were motivated to collaborate from the inception of CLP, especially around outreach and recruitment, joint grantee convenings and trainings, and one-on-one exchanges on topics of mutual interest.

At a deeper level, intermediaries are also self-organizing to establish working partnerships and to build learning communities focused on how best to support small, grassroots organizations and better understand the intersection of race, power, and philanthropy. Intermediary grantees express a hunger to learn more and share across the initiative to enrich their work with community grantees and participants. It should be noted, however, that the leadership intermediaries are working more independently than other intermediaries, most likely because these programs are the most well-established and standalone of all CLP-funded efforts. The CLP program officers themselves are reporting some profound shifts in their thinking about supporting and engaging low-income communities and communities of color. For instance, they cite greater understanding of content areas outside their areas of expertise, a deepened sense of awareness of the inequities faced by communities, and a sense of professional identity around working on issues of equity and disparities.

## Recommendations for Moving Forward

Our observations, findings, and analyses point to various opportunities for fine-tuning the CLP initiative and making it an even more effective engine of positive change in low-income communities of color in California. Below are a number of questions for consideration.

- *What contributions can smaller, community-based grantees make to large foundations' mission and goals? How can large foundations develop meaningful, long-term relationships with these smaller grantees?*
- *What does CLP ultimately hope to accomplish? Giving more attention to the theoretical underpinnings of the initiative would help CLP clarify and focus its efforts.*
- *What kinds of internal foundation infrastructures or regranting partnerships work well for distributing smaller grants but do not distance the foundation staff from the community groups?*
- *To what extent are large foundations and regrantors willing to take risks in investing in community grantees with small budgets?*
- *What values, assumptions, or policies within regrantors' and CLP funders' organizations may be impeding application of the principles and practices of cultural competency? How can trust be created so that assessment data on community grantees' strengths and weakness are shared without a sense that funding is threatened?*

Based on these questions above and our analysis, following are our recommendations:

- ***Clarify CLP's ultimate goals and central strategies.*** CLP is endeavoring to strengthen small organizations serving low-income people and communities of color, develop the pipeline through which talented people of color emerge from their communities to become leaders, and provide grassroots community-based organizations, particularly those that are led by people of color, better access to funding from larger foundations. Although these goals have functioned well in providing a framework for developing the initiative's structure and central strategies, their implications are not spelled out clearly enough to provide intermediaries with the kind of clear guidance they would like to have as they move forward. For example, is the intention to build the capacity of community grantees so that they might be able to access funding directly from the three funders or other large foundations? Or, is it to work with and directly support the community grantees who have already reached this point of readiness through CLP?
- ***Rethink and expand the criteria for assessing the readiness of community organizations.*** The criteria intermediaries are using to assess the readiness of organizations to participate may have the unintended consequence of leaving out organizations that are doing important work in low-income communities and communities of color and have the potential to leapfrog to a new level of effectiveness. If the goal is to emphasize cultural competence in the process of assessing readiness, intermediaries may want to consider additional or alternate means of assessment. For example, when a regrantor has a pre-existing relationship with a community grantee, the authenticity of that relationship may be the basis of a very reliable assessment. In addition, community-based experts or advisory boards can provide accurate assessments of a community grantee's readiness and suitability. Finally, because of its thoroughness, a formal organization assessment may be able to catch intangibles, such as an



organization's motivation to engage in community change efforts that could be missed when relying on a few objective criteria such as budget size.

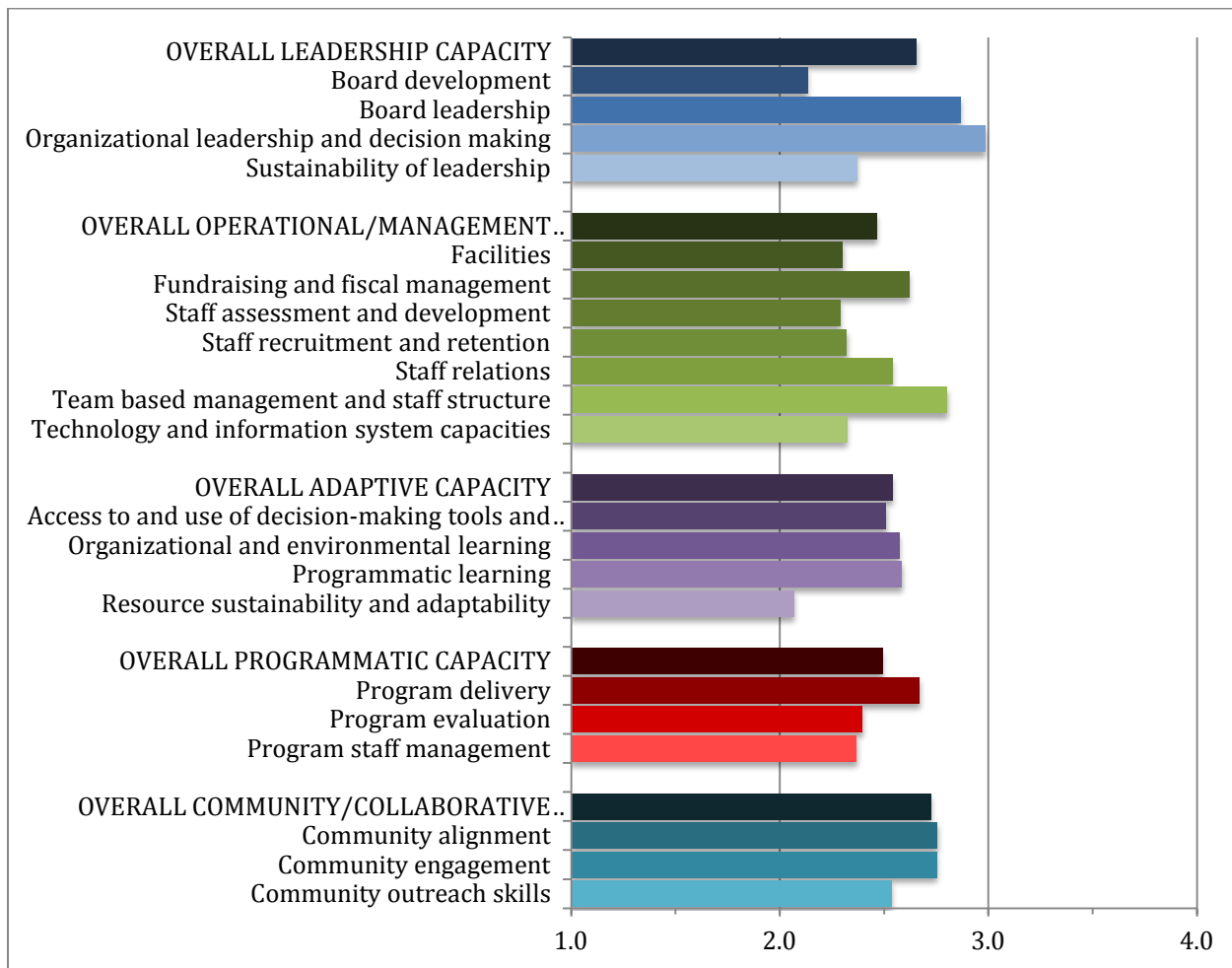
- ***Make the “cultural competency” aspects of capacity building more explicit.*** Despite CLP's emphasis on culturally competent capacity building, some intermediaries struggled to articulate what aspects of their work make them culturally competent, or how race, equity, and power differentials influence the context and content of their capacity-building work. If expectations for, and techniques for achieving, cultural competence were made more explicit, it might help these intermediaries articulate and enhance their cultural competency. At a minimum, we suggest adherence to these three principles: (1) strive to understand as fully as possible the complexity, nuances, and unique dynamics of different cultures, communities, and regions, (2) address the historic lack of access to philanthropy and resources by engaging with community grantees and working with them “in the trenches,” and (3) promote self-determination and power-sharing by focusing on community organizations' assets rather than their deficits (see Attachment B for more details on best practices documented).
- ***Refine and focus CLP's program design.*** CLP was designed around the idea that there was much to learn about the most effective ways to build the capacity of small, community-based organizations. Accordingly, it supports a variety of capacity building approaches, organizational types, fields, and geographic regions. Although this broad, “let a thousand flowers bloom” approach has its advantages, the principle has also led to a diffused set of strategies and some lack of understanding on the part of community grantees regarding the ultimate end or purpose of capacity building. In response, CLP funders may want to develop a more focused and integrated initiative design in any future iteration of the project. One possible approach is to ground the work in a particular field (e.g., human services or health care), movement (e.g., environmental justice) or around a common outcome (e.g., sustainability) so as to create a more concrete and focused context for capacity building.
- ***Focus on the supply side of capacity building.*** As discussed, a shortage of effective capacity-building providers and resources, particularly in the San Joaquin Valley, has made it more challenging for intermediaries to provide the type of coaching and support that helps an organization fully integrate new knowledge and concepts. While the CLP funders are most interested in channeling resources to low-income communities and communities of color, organizations serving these communities cannot be strengthened unless there is a stronger infrastructure in place to support their developmental needs. Therefore, we recommend that CLP investigate ways of maximizing its potential to help build a culturally competent capacity-building infrastructure, particularly in the San Joaquin Valley. CLP funders might, for example, look into ways of leveraging other resources (such as other philanthropic efforts in this area).
- ***Recognize that accomplishing culturally competent and quality capacity building requires considerable amounts of time and resources.*** Intermediaries and CLP program officers struggle with the monumental scale of the task before them and would be well-served by continued patience, institutional support, and

flexibility in program designs. We recommend that CLP continue to support intermediaries to customize their capacity-building services and better meet community grantees and participants “where they are.” It would also help a great deal if CLP program officers’ time was allocated at 20 to 25 percent of FTE level, and the program officers focused that time on getting to know community grantees, build relationships with them, and engage in deeper dialogue about the work that they are doing in their communities.

- ***Improve coordination and collaboration across the initiative by leveraging the current relationships and resources of the regranting, TA, and leadership intermediaries.*** This can be accomplished through a variety of strategies: provide initiative-wide support for programs serving the San Joaquin Valley to coordinate their ongoing outreach and recruitment; integrate resources and opportunities across the three strategies; develop a shared sense of purpose among community grantees (particularly those served by multiple intermediaries); and coordinate intermediaries’ work around a common organizational needs assessment.
- ***Improve the capacity of intermediaries to coordinate and collect evaluation outcome data.*** Based on our experience in 2011 in launching and implementing the evaluation, we recommend that CLP take the following immediate steps to improve the quality of data available for future analysis and reporting:
  - Host a briefing for all intermediaries to share the evaluation findings and the results of the My Healthy Organization assessment.
  - Provide intermediaries (and their evaluators) with more individualized technical assistance on evaluation so that they can align their data-collection tools with the CLP logic model.
  - Track more closely the community grantees and TA and leadership participants that are benefiting from multiple strategies.
  - Conduct a survey to more systematically capture the type, intensity, and dosage of intermediaries’ capacity-building efforts/strategies.
  - Ensure the evaluator’s access to community grantees’ reports and other assessment data so that progress and outcomes can be better assessed.
  - Continue to clarify the role of initiative-level consultants to minimize confusion and streamline touch points with intermediaries and community grantees.

CLP has made tremendous progress over the past two years. CLP grantees and funders alike have expressed a deep hunger to continue learning and share more fluidly across the initiative. Attention to the recommendations provided above will help build a stronger foundation for CLP to benefit low-income communities and communities of color throughout California.

### Attachment A. Average MHO Scores by Capacity and Sub-Capacity



## Attachment B. Cultural Competency in Capacity Building

Principles	Intermediary-Specific Practices
<p><b>Awareness and understanding of the complexity and nuances within cultures, communities, and/or regions:</b> Intermediaries' commitment acknowledges the complexity and multiple layers of cultural competency. This extends beyond issues of representation and providing translations services, in order to strive for a deep understanding of the nuances and dynamics special to each community</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Building trust within communities through using a stronger relational approach (e.g. conducting more site visits, in –person meetings) and being available to understand each organization's relationship to the community, its specific goals and vision, and context of operation.</li> <li>• Approaching the work with humility, openness and willingness to examining assumptions that are brought to the work</li> <li>• Building the capacity of capacity builders in specific regions and not hiring consultants or providers outside of the region who do not have a long-term commitment and investment in the area</li> <li>• Creating the space to safely and meaningfully share cultural traditions between the intermediaries and other grantees so that differences are appreciated and honored and commonalities form a basis for building lasting relationships</li> <li>• Incorporating a multi-level framework and understanding that communities fall at the center of issues of racism, sexism, classism etc and institutional barriers</li> <li>• Ensuring that key foundation/intermediary staff who interface with minority-led organizations are reflective of the diversity of their communities and are readily accessible to community groups geographically and culturally</li> <li>• Ensuring that program facilitators have done their own personal work around issues of culture, race, power to be able to facilitate and integrate culture into every aspect of the program curriculum (rather than an stand alone topic)</li> </ul>
<p><b>Promoting access and bridging gaps and barriers:</b> Intermediaries' engagement with their grantees as a more "in the trenches" relationship to provide in-depth, ongoing support to address a historic lack of access to philanthropy and resources</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Providing long-term, multi-year engagement to go in-depth with minority-led community organizations and build their capacity</li> <li>• Incorporating more flexible processes in grantmaking practices, including allowing grantees to submit applications instead of proposals, allowing grantees to submit applications in multiple ways (i.e. email, handwritten and in their native language), and providing TA to grantees if they do not know how to fill out a section of the proposal.</li> <li>• Investing in more overhead resources to implement a range of non-traditional, culturally intentional funding practices</li> <li>• Adapting materials to be more accessible for leaders, and delivering tools and supports in their native languages</li> <li>• Holding convenings and webinars at times and locations that are feasible and convenient to grantees (e.g. outside of normal business hours if grantee volunteer-staff have full-time jobs) and providing compensation for their time</li> </ul>
<p><b>Self determination/ power sharing:</b> Intermediaries using an asset-based approach with grantees to help them determine and evaluate the needs of their own communities and organizations, while at the same time providing tailored guidance and feedback  This is in contrast to a deficit-oriented framework where needs are pre-identified and all expertise and resources to meet those needs come from outside the community.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Presenting a menu of capacity-building strategies to grantees to allow them to identify the best approach for their community</li> <li>• Asking questions instead of prescribing models to allow for leaders to apply their own respective cultural and systemic analysis to their work</li> <li>• Engaging grantees as experts with wisdom and experience to share as peer mentors and facilitating peer learning around discussions of common challenges and promising approaches (e.g., working together on the issue of language retention across different cultures and communities)</li> </ul>