



SIERRA HEALTH FOUNDATION
An Endowment for Northern California

Engaging Youth in Community Change

*Outcomes and Lessons Learned
from Sierra Health Foundation's
REACH Youth Program*



NOVEMBER 2010

Final Evaluation Report

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UC DAVIS
UNIVERSITY OF CALIFORNIA

REACH *
CONNECTING
COMMUNITIES AND YOUTH
FOR A HEALTHY FUTURE
A PROGRAM OF SIERRA HEALTH FOUNDATION

Dear Colleagues,

It is with great pleasure that we share this evaluation report, *Engaging Youth in Community Change: Outcomes and Lessons Learned from Sierra Health Foundation's REACH Youth Program*.

In 2005, the Sierra Health Foundation board of directors made a commitment to improving the health of youth by approving \$8 million over five years to create youth development coalitions in seven communities across the Sacramento region. This decision extended the foundation's goal of improving the well-being of children, which began with our previous initiative, *Community Partnerships for Healthy Children*. In 2006, the foundation launched *REACH: Connecting Communities and Youth for a Healthy Future* with a vision to ensure healthy development and leadership opportunities for youth between the ages of 10 and 15.

We undertook this work understanding it was about more than making progress in seven communities, and committed ourselves to learning all we could. Accordingly, we share this evaluation of the program—including successes and challenges—to contribute to the body of knowledge that supports effective youth development and community building, with the hope that it will serve as a valuable resource to others engaged in or considering similar efforts.

The REACH Program and this report would not have been possible without the vast number of partners who were on this journey with us. We offer our heartfelt thanks to all of the community-based partners, schools, public officials, technical assistance providers, coalition staff members, volunteers, adult allies and the hundreds of young people who made REACH successful in their communities. We also thank the evaluators from the California Communities Program at University of California, Davis, who dedicated themselves to this project and surpassed all expectations we had of them.

The release of this evaluation report marks a significant milestone in our journey—yet it is far from over. We plan to add new partnerships to those formed through REACH as we continue our work to ensure all young people are healthy and prepared to succeed in the region. Initial steps to achieve this goal were taken in 2008, when Vacaville and Yuba-Sutter accepted our invitation to join the REACH Program. While their stories are not captured here, we can report that they are benefiting from the experiences of the original sites, and are poised to make unique contributions of their own.

Finally, and most importantly, we hope you find in this report evidence of the enormous potential, resilience, energy, optimism and civic spirit held by youth across the region. These shared attributes bind their common future in ways we are only beginning to understand. The challenge facing those committed to building a healthy and prosperous future is to ensure the investments needed to make sure all youth are on track to reach their full potential are made now. We believe we all will benefit if we succeed.

Sincerely,



Chet P. Hewitt

President and CEO

Sierra Health Foundation

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Executive Summary

FROM 2006 TO 2010, SIERRA HEALTH FOUNDATION'S REACH PROGRAM committed \$8 million to support the healthy development of youth in the Greater Sacramento, California, region. As a centerpiece of the larger grantmaking strategy, seven grantees in the region were selected to create community coalitions that involved both youth and adults in their planning processes and community change strategies. The socially and economically diverse group of communities included El Dorado Hills, Galt, Meadowview, Rancho Cordova, South Sacramento, West Sacramento and Woodland (see community and grantee profiles in Appendix A).

Across the seven communities, several hundred youth and adults participated in sustained ways during the three-year period of our research from May 2007 to April 2010. This final REACH evaluation report—based on 346 interviews (87 with youth participants) and more than 320 observations of REACH meetings and events, as well as a review of key REACH documents and relevant literature—documents REACH outcomes and draws on an analysis of REACH evidence to articulate lessons for the field of community youth development.¹

REACH Outcomes

REACH sought to help youth succeed by 1) building local youth-adult coalitions, 2) providing meaningful engagement and leadership opportunities for youth who directly participated in the coalitions, and 3) catalyzing community and policy change strategies that would enhance the overall level of support and opportunity for youth in each locale. Our outcomes analysis distinguishes outcomes at the individual,

organizational and community scales. Among the most noteworthy accomplishments that were consistent across the seven sites are the following:

New Skills and Outlooks Among Individuals and Organizations

- REACH provided significant and immediate benefits to participating youth including new skills (e.g., public speaking, how to organize and lead meetings), meaningful adult relationships, a sense of community awareness and responsibility, and increased self-confidence.
- REACH promoted adult and youth learning about the concepts and practices of youth development and youth engagement via training, networking, camps, conferences and peer learning—resulting in an improved ability of adults to cede meaningful control to youth while remaining fully present in support roles.

¹ A more detailed implementation study of REACH is provided in our February 2009 Interim Evaluation Report, which is available at: <http://groups.ucanr.org/CCP/files/63727.pdf>

Increased Ability of Local Organizations and Institutions to Support Youth Development

- REACH demonstrated that a wide variety of approaches to engaging youth in their communities can be used to enhance the local menu of developmental support and opportunities—from one-time community cleanup projects to ongoing youth service on community boards and committees, to sustained efforts to organize youth voice in ways that change local institutions or policies.
- Lead agencies increased their capacity to facilitate community youth development projects. At least one coalition partner organization in each setting—including key public institutions like schools or city commissions—adopted new youth development strategies as a result of the program.

Promising Steps Toward Community and Regional-scale Change

- REACH-funded coalitions became a place to go for youth development ideas and activities in the participating communities.
- In all seven communities, we observed increasing awareness of key youth issues, developing capacity to bring youth perspectives to local decision-making bodies, and gathering momentum for particular ideas, strategies and approaches.

- Sierra Health Foundation's REACH program raised the regional profile of youth development and youth civic engagement by spreading the idea of youth as community assets and increasing positive media coverage of youth.

Lessons for the Field

REACH provided the occasion for learning from seven complex community settings in which coalitions experimented with different strategies to engage youth in community-scale changes to promote youth development. Among the key lessons—a number of which challenge some aspect of conventional thinking—are the following:

- Putting youth engagement in the center of a community change strategy can yield benefits, but requires more time, resources, focus and commitment than many anticipate.
- Schools were the most significant institutional players in local coalitions, despite the tendency for some to view them as impenetrable bureaucracies.



The West Sacramento Youth Resource Coalition and its Sactown Heroes youth leadership group are regulars at city hall, gathering there for coalition, city council and youth commission meetings. Youth and adult members of the coalition work together and with community organizations to nurture youth leaders and promote policy changes that support young people in their community.

- Parents or caretakers can serve as important partners in community youth development, despite being overlooked in many frameworks and approaches.
- REACH initially targeted 10- to 15-year-olds, but coalitions found that older and more experienced youth were often better able to understand and contribute to the work of community change; they also wanted to keep youth engaged over time rather than excluding them when they reached an upper age limit.
- The program’s “all youth” strategy did not result in widespread engagement of vulnerable populations or attention to their concerns and capacities. However, promising work in some settings provided important lessons about the kinds of intentionality, focus, commitment and capacity necessary.
- Despite investing considerable resources in coalition development, REACH suggests that many desirable outcomes—including inter-organizational networking (local and regional), training in youth development principles and engaging youth—do not necessarily require a full-fledged coalition.
- Among the key variables influencing REACH outcomes, the quality and continuity of the staff who work with youth and their community ties and connections has been the most important. This suggests that foundations might want to encourage grantees to use or cultivate existing local talent, instead of hiring individuals from outside the community.
- Turnover of key staff is a regular feature of a longer-term community change program, rather than the exception; foundations should approach grantee selection, technical assistance provision and reporting requirements with the expectation of turnover firmly in mind.
- Building linkages among local participants through common training activities can develop the initial foundation for a regional learning network, but cannot by itself generate the intensity of strategic focus, ally development and mutual commitment required for coordinated policy work or regional change strategies.
- Implementing a “learning initiative” requires a developmental approach that is significantly at odds with many prevailing norms in funder-grantee relationships. Learning requires willingness to experiment and adapt, tolerance for failure and constructive debate over ideas, but grantees typically feel the need to put their best foot forward, sticking to what they said they would do or what they feel they are expected to do, lest they expose themselves to unwanted scrutiny.

The report concludes with three broader recommendations for youth funders and practitioners: 1) embrace the developmental nature of this work, 2) be clear about the vision and values underlying the approach to youth engagement and systems/policy change, and 3) be specific about the type of policy change work to be pursued.

The full report provides a more complete treatment of the outcomes and lessons learned identified in this summary. Additional findings with respect to coalition development, youth engagement, youth media, parent engagement, school-community partnerships and REACH camp may be found in the REACH Issue Brief Series (see Appendix B for topics covered).

Introduction

THIS IS THE FINAL EVALUATION REPORT for Sierra Health Foundation's REACH Youth Program. It is divided into three main sections:

- an introduction to REACH, describing its major goals, assumptions, participants, features and challenges;
- documentation of REACH-related outcomes for individuals, organizations, communities and the region; and
- lessons for the field, focusing on coalition development, youth engagement and foundation practices to support community youth development.

The REACH Evaluation

Committed to making REACH a learning initiative, Sierra Health Foundation asked an evaluation team from the California Communities Program at University of California, Davis, to assess the outcomes of the program and to document lessons learned.² Our charge was to document common overall outcomes looking *across* the seven coalitions, rather than a detailed accounting of outcomes *within* each specific coalition area.³ The overall outcomes and lessons learned described in this report are supported by a broad consensus of opinion among key stakeholders and strong confirming evidence from our evaluation team's fieldwork and observations. At the same time, our team alone is responsible for the specific content and interpretations included in this report.

Before REACH implementation began, we worked with stakeholders to design a detailed process study that systematically compared implementation in the seven original REACH communities, and an outcome analysis focused on three primary objectives: coalition development, meaningful engagement of youth and community change. This report focuses on

key REACH outcomes and lessons learned; a more detailed process analysis of REACH implementation can be found in our February 2009 interim evaluation report. Our field research covered the three-year period from the beginning of REACH implementation grants in May 2007 through April 2010.⁴

We draw on a variety of evidence, including 346 interviews (87 with youth participants) and more than 320 observations of REACH meetings and events, as well as a review of key REACH documents and relevant literature. A summary of our team's evaluation activities is provided in Appendix C, and a description of our data and methods is available in Appendix D.

² A more complete summary of the REACH evaluation design can be found at: <http://groups.ucanr.org/CCP/files/43570.pdf>

³ For more details on accomplishments within each of the seven communities, see their annual reports available online at: www.sierrahealth.org

⁴ Most of the seven original REACH coalitions received no-cost extensions on their grants beyond April 30, 2010, and all express hope that their REACH-related work will continue into the future. The activities of two subsequently funded coalitions in Vacaville and Yuba-Sutter are expected to continue until the end of 2012 or early 2013, but are not part of the scope of this report (except to the extent that recent work with the new grantees by the foundation and technical assistance team has revealed earlier lessons learned).

REACH: An Investment in the Healthy Development of Youth

FROM 2006 TO 2010, SIERRA HEALTH FOUNDATION'S REACH PROGRAM committed \$8 million to support the healthy development of youth in the Greater Sacramento, California, region.⁵ As a centerpiece of the larger grantmaking strategy, seven community coalitions in the region were given almost \$5 million in Community Action grants from 2006 to 2010 to assess community conditions, build community capacity for change, and implement strategies that increase meaningful supports and opportunities for youth. The seven included grantees in El Dorado Hills, Galt, Meadowview, Rancho Cordova, South Sacramento, West Sacramento and Woodland, representing a mix of urban neighborhoods, large and small towns, inner and outer ring suburbs and rural areas (see community and grantee profiles in Appendix A).

Initial nine-month planning grants of \$75,000 gave each community coalition an opportunity to assess its community's strengths, challenges and resources, and create an action plan.⁶ In late spring 2007, the seven coalitions were awarded implementation grants of \$600,000, distributed over three years.

Throughout the program, grantees received technical assistance in the areas of youth development and engagement, coalition development and evaluation. In response to emerging needs during later stages of the program, the foundation offered additional support for policy work and sustainability planning. The total investment in technical assistance was substantial, representing approximately 15 percent of all REACH funding.

In addition, grantees benefited from a variety of companion strategies, including a summer camp experience for REACH youth, small grants to support youth-led community projects, Program Improvement grants for youth-serving organizations, trainings, conferences and supplemental grants to support parent engagement or work with older youth (see page 8 for more detail on these companion strategies).

To expand the coverage of REACH in the region, two new community coalitions—in Vacaville and Yuba-Sutter—were funded in 2008 and were able to take advantage of lessons learned during the earlier stages of the program. All told, REACH represented a significant attempt by Sierra Health Foundation to raise the regional profile of youth development and youth engagement.

⁵ For more information on the REACH program, visit Sierra Health Foundation's web site: www.sierrahealth.org.

⁶ See Erbstein (2007) for documentation of the planning phase.

Core REACH Ideas and Assumptions

The initial framework or theory of change guiding the program was the “Community Action Framework for Youth Development” developed by Youth Development Strategies, Inc. (Gambone, Klein and Connell, 2002).⁷ The framework synthesizes a wide range of research to identify the need for systems change to better provide crucial developmental supports and opportunities for youth. Although it is not a clearly articulated element of the Gambone framework, youth engagement was a key REACH principle and all local coalitions were encouraged to involve youth directly in their planning processes and community change strategies.⁸

Inherent in the REACH Community Action strategy is the belief that a key way to promote regional change is one community at a time. The assumption is that foundation support can spark and complement the natural inclination of communities to be most interested in investing in their own youth and in local institutions. At the same time, there is recognition that local grantees benefit from regional connections and support.



REACH Participants

Using data that coalitions reported online to track attendance at their meetings, our interim report estimated regular, ongoing participation levels at about 12 to 18 youth and 6 to 10 adults per coalition (with approximately 308 youth and 189 adults attending meetings during the period January to October 2008).⁹

Overall participation levels during the last year and a half of the program remained relatively steady, as did the makeup of participants. At the 77 REACH coalition and REACH youth council meetings our team observed between September 2009 and April 2010, a total of 493 youth and 449 adults attended (duplicated count). Average participation per full coalition meeting was 11 adults and 4 youth. Average participation at youth council meetings was 10 youth and 2 adults.

We estimate that more than 500 individual youth and an equal number of adults participated in REACH on more than a casual or one-time basis.¹⁰ Of the youth we interviewed in focus groups at the close of the program, most had been involved for six months to a year, and a few for the entirety of REACH (three years plus the planning phase).

Youth and adults from the coalitions gathered at Sierra Health Foundation's Grizzly Creek Ranch in Plumas County for the annual REACH Camp. The weeklong summer youth development camp provided meaningful experiences and opportunities to learn about topics such as youth development practices, leadership, community change and policy change, as well as to gain self-confidence and have fun together.

⁷ Following the practice of REACH stakeholders, we will refer to this jointly authored framework simply as the Gambone framework.

⁸ For a list of REACH guiding principles, see www.sierrahealth.org

⁹ In response to grantee feedback that the online reporting system was too time consuming, we have relied on our own meeting observations to estimate participation levels for this report. Between September 2009 and April 2010, our team collected attendance data at 40 coalition meetings and 37 youth council/youth group meetings. This relatively large sample of the total number of meetings provides a good basis for estimating the ability of REACH to elicit the ongoing participation of youth and adults.

¹⁰ Estimating the total numbers of individual youth and adult participants over the course of REACH is difficult given the significant turnover in which youth and adults were participating regularly. Youth turnover was highest in coalitions where the primary staff contact(s) changed one or more times. In a few cases, coalitions had difficulty keeping adults who originally participated at the table, but often that was offset either by recruitment of new adult participants or by substantial gains in the number of youth participants.

REACH youth participants were, overall, a diverse group in terms of gender, ethnicity and, to some extent, socioeconomic status, although the diversity of youth varied across grantees (see interim report for more detailed information on youth participants). However, it is important to report that despite the program’s emphasis on “all youth,” few coalitions made a focused effort to engage youth populations that are especially vulnerable to poor health, educational and economic trajectories—for example, youth in foster care, youth who are struggling in school, youth who have been involved with the juvenile justice system, etc. Those that did so offer some important lessons, which we document briefly later in this report and more fully in a REACH Issue Brief.¹¹

Adult participants were drawn from a wide range of community sectors and types of organizations. The one common denominator across the seven sites was the presence of school personnel, who made up approximately a quarter of all adult participants.

Local Coalition Staff

Among the key variables influencing REACH outcomes, the quality and continuity of the staff who work with youth and their community ties and connections have been the most important. This suggests that foundations might want to encourage grantees to use or cultivate existing local talent, instead of hiring individuals from outside the community. One successful approach during REACH was to hire community

youth and young adults as organizers/coordinators, pair them with more experienced staff, and create ladders of responsibility—options that were pursued in slightly different ways by the Meadowview, South Sacramento and West Sacramento coalitions.

Grantees spent approximately 80 percent of their REACH budgets on staff salaries and typically had two to four staff working on REACH, with some of those part-time and/or supported in part with non-REACH funds. At the time of the interim report, all but two of the seven coalitions had experienced turnover in one or more core staff during the implementation period. Since the interim report, staff stability improved, with only one of the seven coalitions experiencing significant turnover. In general, this stability had a positive effect on the ability of the coalitions to focus and sustain momentum.

A REACH lesson learned is that turnover must be expected as a regular feature of a longer-term community change initiative. Reporting requirements, logistical planning and technical assistance provision must be crafted with the expectation of turnover firmly in mind.

¹¹ See REACH Issue Brief “Toward Making Good on All Youth: Engaging Underrepresented Youth Populations in Community Youth Development.”

COALITION PROFILE

Galt Area Youth Coalition

This community partnership formed to create positive opportunities for youth and represents students in the communities of Galt, Herald, Acampo and nearby areas. The coalition works to strengthen partnerships between schools and communities, and promotes opportunities for youth leadership, civic engagement and service learning.

Location: City of 28,000 and surrounding unincorporated communities south of Sacramento

School Ethnicities:

White	46%	African-American	2%
Latino	46%	Asian-American	2%

Median Income: \$30,000—\$73,000

Lead Agency: Galt Joint Union Elementary School District

Coalition Model: Activity hub for students from multiple schools

Strategic Focus: Developing youth master plan, service learning



REACH Companion Strategies

In addition to supporting direct community action, the foundation sponsored a variety of activities with the goal of helping the grantees and others in the region to advance youth development goals and build stronger regional networks, including:

REACH Camp¹²

Over the course of three summers, Sierra Health Foundation hosted a weeklong summer youth development camp for REACH coalitions at its Grizzly Creek Ranch facilities in Portola, California. Part youth development conference, part community organizing workshop and part traditional summer camp, roughly 20 adults and 70 youth lived, worked and played together in an environment focused on youth development practices and community change strategies. Evaluation data gathered through interviews and site observations across the coalitions reveals numerous positive references to camp. The camp experience was deemed so important by coalitions that they cooperated to make it happen again in the summer of 2010.

Program Improvement Grants

During the first half of the REACH Program, the foundation offered grants of up to \$10,000 to increase the reach and impact of existing youth programs and to promote the development of new programs. Grant applicants were expected to reflect REACH principles, but could come from any community in the region. In a few of the seven REACH communities, these grants played an important role in funding specific coalition activities, such as a mural project in Woodland.

GABY/HOPE Grants

With funding support from Sierra Health Foundation, the Sacramento Region Community Foundation manages a youth philanthropy program. The Grants Advisory Board for Youth (GABY), made up of youth between the ages of 12 and 19, gives youth experience in decision making and new knowledge of their

communities, while providing small HOPE (Helping Other People Excel) grants that support youth-led community projects. REACH had some effect in expanding participation in GABY, particularly in less-advantaged communities.

Peer Learning

REACH promoted opportunities such as: a learning community among grantee site coordinators that shared ideas about parent engagement; mentoring relationships in which communities that had received federal grants helped other REACH communities do the same; and less formal communication as REACH coordinators and youth participants became friends and shared experiences and ideas.

Supplemental Grants to Deepen Parent Engagement or Work with Older Youth

In response to emerging interest from the REACH coalitions, the foundation provided supplemental grants of \$15,000 to support the engagement of parents or caretakers of REACH youth and/or of older youth populations. These are described briefly later in this report and in more detail in a REACH Issue Brief.

Listserv and Page on Facebook

A REACH listserv was actively used to publicize local and regional events, make youth and adults aware of training or service opportunities, communicate information about grant opportunities and other information of interest. During later stages of the program, technical assistance providers launched a REACH page on Facebook with the goal of reaching youth participants using social media.

Youth Conferences

Two well-attended youth conferences (350 in 2007 and more than 500 in 2008) have provided a unique space for bringing together youth and the region's youth development constituents for continuing education, peer support and networking.

¹² For a more detailed discussion of REACH camp, see our REACH Issue Brief "Using a Camp to Bolster Youth-driven Community Change."

Adapting to Implementation Challenges

The REACH goals are ambitious—they mark an attempt to catalyze community-scale change rather than directing funds solely to support individual programs, organizations or leaders. Fostering community change, promoting youth engagement and achieving positive youth development are complex undertakings on their own terms. Trying to combine the three within a single program multiplies the difficulty, particularly since it is unlikely that any single grantee or their staff will be well versed in all the requisite skills, knowledge and networks. The coalition development strategy can potentially mitigate these difficulties by developing strategic partnerships, but brings its own challenges. In addition, the funding level per grantee and the three-year REACH timeframe are relatively modest compared to some initiatives.¹³ Complex change initiatives of this type often require five years or more to generate demonstrable results in terms of community-scale changes.¹⁴

Our interim report identified a number of REACH implementation elements requiring some deliberate rethinking or mid-course correction. Overall, the response of the coalitions, technical assistance providers and the foundation to the suggested changes has been positive and productive. The most significant adaptations pursued include:

¹³ For example, between 1996 and 2006 the William and Flora Hewlett Foundation invested \$20 million in three Bay Area neighborhoods (Brown and Fiester, 2007).

¹⁴ Discussions at a recent forum on place-based anti-poverty initiatives suggested at least a 10-year timeframe (University of Chicago, Chapin Hall, December 11, 2008).

Age Limits

One lesson learned during REACH is the need to think carefully in advance about the age range of youth to engage in community change work. REACH initially targeted 10- to 15-year-olds, but through a mid-course adjustment eventually expanded to include many older youth. This took place for two primary reasons: 1) coalitions found that older and more experienced youth were often better able to understand and contribute to the work of community change, and 2) the desire to keep youth engaged over time rather than excluding them when they reached an upper age limit. Although some coalitions struggled with engaging older and younger youth at the same time, most found it beneficial to have a mix of age ranges and to have well-planned opportunities for younger youth to interact with and learn from their older peers.

Development of Site-specific Objectives/Strategies

In our interim report we noted that—collectively—grantees reported more than 50 separate sub-projects and activities. REACH resources (e.g. fiscal, human and organizational) were being spread thinly rather than being sufficiently focused to achieve significant community-scale impact. Since that time, technical assistance providers worked with each coalition to develop a short list of objectives (termed “gold medals”) to narrow their scope and focus more directly on policy and/or community change. Both grantees and technical assistance providers found the new emphasis helpful. The resulting changes incrementally lowered the number of separate projects and activities at most sites, and tended to introduce a more consistent emphasis on making community-scale and policy changes. Still, the ability of the coalitions to develop a strategic focus was uneven, revealing how difficult it can be to forge a tight link between broad-scale goals and specific strategies, especially with the additional goal of meaningfully engaging youth.

Throughout the REACH Program, youth and adults from all of the coalitions participated in interactive group workshops, training sessions and planning meetings.





All of the REACH coalitions incorporated community service projects and/or service learning into their work. Shown here are youth in El Dorado Hills engaged in a teen gardening project.

Shift to Emphasize an On-site Coaching Model of Technical Assistance

Our interim report noted the need to better balance and coordinate the work of the technical assistance team and to shift the emphasis from group trainings emphasizing general topics and held at the foundation to a more tailored, on-site coaching model. This shift was needed to address: 1) a desire for greater responsiveness to local needs, 2) the time and expense associated with attending technical assistance sessions during the day and outside the community, and 3) the need to build more local capacity and shared understanding, particularly important in the context of coalition coordinator turnover. Subsequently, technical assistance providers emphasized an on-site coaching model, where providers from different organizations coordinated joint site visits. This switch was deemed successful by all stakeholders. Overall, grantees were highly satisfied with the provision of technical assistance during the program, and preferred a combination of ongoing on-site coaching with selective use of joint training at a common site, as well as occasions to come together for mutual reflection and peer learning.

Focus on Sustainability

While the need to focus on local sustainability was raised early in the grant period, during the latter part of REACH, technical assistance providers—including one new consultant hired just for this purpose—worked with coalitions to encourage sustainability planning. Although emphasizing financial sustainability, the assistance tried to pose the issue in broad terms that went beyond simply identifying new grants or contracts to seek. Coalitions were encouraged to think carefully about their existing connections, relationships and accomplishments, so they could become clearer about what they wanted to sustain and how. A majority of the coalitions/lead agencies received new grants before REACH ended. These tended to emphasize direct services and were neither large enough nor flexible enough to simply permit a continuation of REACH staffing levels or community mobilization activities. The relatively brief REACH timeframe created tension around sustainability, since it is difficult to attract new investment until results have been demonstrated. Also, few if any coalition partners were willing and/or able to contribute their own organizational financial resources to the joint effort. Other financing models, such as social entrepreneurship or developer agreements, received minimal or no attention, but could provide alternatives to a reliance on external grants.

Observable Outcomes

REACH SOUGHT TO CREATE CHANGES in individuals, organizations and communities, and to use the REACH community coalitions to create a foundation for a broader regional network to support youth development. Our outcomes analysis reveals noteworthy accomplishments with respect to each of these goals.

Individual-level Outcomes

REACH provided significant benefits to youth who sustained their participation. Among those benefits most frequently articulated by youth we interviewed are the following:

- establishing meaningful relationships with adults within and beyond their coalitions;
- building new skills, particularly in public speaking and in how to organize and lead meetings;
- developing a new sense of community awareness and responsibility, along with knowledge about local systems and policy change strategies;
- increasing self-confidence in dealing with peers and adults;
- opening their eyes to college opportunities or career ambitions;
- fostering new or deeper connections with peers in their own or other communities, including those from socioeconomic or racial backgrounds very different than their own and whom they likely would not have met otherwise.

On many occasions, adults directly involved with REACH youth experienced the joy of seeing a particular young person develop, mature, take on new responsibilities and become excited by emerging possibilities for themselves and their communities. This joy took many specific forms, and its significance in feeding the energy and commitment that animated REACH over time should not be underestimated.

Via various activities—including formal training, on-site coaching, peer learning and a summer camp program—REACH promoted adult and youth learning about youth development and youth engagement. Evidence of this learning includes:

- development of shared vocabulary and concepts (e.g., youth as assets, Hart’s ladder, icebreakers);
- youth in focus groups who express confidence that their voice will and should be heard within organizations and the community; and
- adult coordinators exhibiting an increasing ability to cede control over coalition meetings and activities to youth leaders, while present in supportive roles.

Organizational and Institutional Outcomes

REACH supported a variety of approaches to engaging youth in their communities, creating new opportunities in each setting. Local youth civic engagement capacity was increased, spearheaded by the REACH coalition, but included at least one other significant organizational partner in every community (and sometimes multiple partners). These partners included public institutions, such as school districts, city youth commissions, parks and recreation departments and others.

The approaches organizations used to engage youth included community service/service learning, media and art, philanthropy, research and evaluation, civic engagement, community organizing and direct involvement in decision making and governance.¹⁵ As detailed in Table 1, the examples range in significance from one-time community cleanup projects, to ongoing youth service on community boards or committees, to sustained efforts to organize youth voice in ways that change local institutions or policies.



The Vision Coalition of El Dorado Hills partnered with Royer Studios to provide training, equipment and production assistance for youth to create live-action videos. The young people involved gained new skills, while addressing topics of importance to them.

¹⁵The seven approaches and their descriptions draw upon the typology of the Search Institute (2005), as described in Gray and Hayes (2008).

COALITION PROFILE

South Sacramento Coalition for Future Leaders

Youth and adults in this coalition seek a community where youth have the opportunity to grow, be safe and realize their full potential. By actively engaging youth as community leaders, the coalition has increased youth access to the arts, job training, employment and mentoring relationships.

Location: Large urban neighborhood of about 73,000 in Sacramento

School Ethnicities:

White	14%	African-American	15%
Latino	36%	Asian-American	30%

Median Income: \$27,000-\$32,000

Lead Agency: Sacramento Mutual Housing Association

Coalition Model: Adult and youth committees on priority topics

Strategic Focus: Youth arts, safety, mentoring, jobs



Table 1 | Examples of Youth Civic Engagement Opportunities Created, By Approach

The categories in this table cover all major types of approaches used during REACH, but the examples are not a full or exhaustive list of REACH activities either within or across coalitions.

<p>Youth Service Volunteering, community service and service learning</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Community cleanup and service projects (<i>all</i>) • Organized event to raise awareness about disabilities (<i>Galt</i>) • Organized youth leadership conferences for hundreds of youth (<i>Meadowview</i>)
<p>Youth Media Participation through public art</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Produced and screened five youth-produced documentaries about community conditions¹⁶ • Launched monthly Art Walk featuring youth-produced art (<i>South Sacramento</i>) • Painted murals representing local history on building walls (<i>Woodland</i>)
<p>Youth Philanthropy Personal giving, fundraising and grantmaking</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Raised more than \$20,000 to benefit children in Africa (<i>El Dorado Hills</i>) • Gave mini-grants to support needy students, events and emergency preparedness (<i>Galt, Woodland</i>) • Funded projects to tackle hunger, literacy and the environment (<i>Rancho Cordova</i>)
<p>Youth in Research and Evaluation Contribution to conducting research and its use</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Survey identifies types of programs to be supported by proposed parcel tax measure (<i>Meadowview</i>) • Youth research displayed in comic book increases awareness about unsafe places (<i>West Sacramento</i>)
<p>Youth Civic Engagement Civic activities, electoral activities and political voice</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Community members/youth inform youth master plan (<i>Galt</i>) • Youth protest school budget cuts on the steps of the State Capitol (<i>Rancho Cordova</i>) • Sacramento mayoral candidates answer youth questions at debate (<i>Meadowview</i>) • Youth share perspectives on school budget cuts with school board (<i>Woodland</i>) • Youth work with architects to inform park design (<i>West Sacramento</i>) • Social host ordinances are passed (<i>Galt and South Sacramento</i>)
<p>Youth Organizing Strategies to create institutional change</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Students successfully press for changes in school policies and practices (<i>Meadowview</i>) • Youth advocate for tax to fund youth programs (<i>Meadowview and South Sacramento</i>)
<p>Youth Decision Making and Governance Youth advise/serve as decision makers</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Youth sit on councils that inform planning and policymaking for the city council and a community action network (<i>West Sacramento</i>) • Community services district supports and funds teen advisory council (<i>El Dorado Hills</i>) • Juvenile justice and delinquency committee reserves seats for two youth representatives (<i>Woodland</i>)

¹⁶ The videos can be viewed at: www.sierrahealth.org. A more complete description and analysis of the youth media work during REACH is available in our issue brief “Youth Produced Media in Community Change Efforts.”

The annual REACH Camp at Grizzly Creek Ranch brought together youth and adults with a diverse range of ethnic and socioeconomic backgrounds from across the capital region. The camp provided an environment for participants to meet new people and strengthen existing relationships.



REACH increased the interest of civic and institutional leaders in ensuring that youth perspectives are regularly heard when making program and policy decisions. For example:

- Youth service providers and other institutional representatives who participated in REACH were introduced to the need for systems and policy change and to the promise of youth as advocates for these changes. In Galt this led to the creation of a youth master plan.¹⁷ In Meadowview, Sacramento ACT hired youth organizers for the first time and found ways to engage increasing numbers of youth in their organization’s citywide policy change work.
- Coalitions took advantage of opportunities in their communities to insert youth voices into the work of public agencies or commissions, such as school boards, transportation planning bodies and city

councils. For example, adults in West Sacramento helped push for reviving a youth commission and for enabling youth to play key roles in a city park planning process.

Community and Regional-scale Outcomes

REACH promoted promising steps toward broader community change. Broad, community-scale changes do not happen in a single leap, but build on small steps that create visible results and build momentum. REACH grantees produced a number of such promising achievements, as summarized in Table 2. Whether and how these wins provide the foundation or momentum toward broader changes of more significant value is impossible to predict at this time.

¹⁷ A youth master plan brings together key community stakeholders to articulate a vision for children, youth and families and to craft coordinated strategies to realize community goals. For more information, see the National League of Cities brochure at: http://www.nlc.org/assets/fe8fc40157954b35aa6bc9c0c450d330/iyef_action_kit_youth_master_planning.pdf

COALITION PROFILE

Rancho Cordova Children, Youth and Family Collaborative

This community collaborative works toward creating safe neighborhoods so that all youth experience emotional and physical safety. Adults and youth work together to create policy change in their community, in partnership with schools, city government and other community organizations.

Location: Newly incorporated city of about 53,000 just east of Sacramento

School Ethnicities:

White	50%	African-American	16%
Latino	23%	Asian-American	6%

Median Income: \$46,000

Lead Agency: Folsom Cordova Community Partnership (service agency)

Coalition Model: After-school youth group tied to pre-existing collaborative

Strategic Focus: Youth safety



Table 2 | REACH-related Outcomes: Promising Steps Toward Community Change¹⁸

<p>Across Multiple Sites</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Fostered positive media coverage of youth • Focused attention on key youth issues and potential solutions • Increased youth and their parents/caretakers contact with elected officials, agency representatives and other community leaders • Created a local go-to place for youth development ideas and activities
<p>Galt Area Youth Coalition</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Community adopts comprehensive youth master plan covering ages 0 to 24 • Elementary school district superintendent commits to train staff in youth development • Service learning diffused throughout community • City departments and schools report working more collaboratively
<p>Rancho Cordova Children, Youth and Family Collaborative</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Collected data and built support for youth safety compact • City council supports a 15-year lease on space for a new youth center • Parks and recreation department starts a youth advisory council • Helped expand a nonprofit that provides training in organic food production and nutrition education to more than 1,000 youth per year
<p>Sacramento ACT Meadowview Partnership</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Organizing reshapes student-teacher relationships, discipline policy and maintenance at the local high school • Expanded the Parent-Teacher Home Visit Project and Parent University—strategies increasing student achievement and graduation • Advocated for a city parcel tax for youth with youth-generated research • Partnered with the city and a workforce development agency to increase youth in pre-employment training and educate business about youth hiring
<p>South Sacramento Coalition for Future Leaders</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Peer mediation and anger management classes at four schools led to decreased suspensions and disruptions and increased test scores • More than 100 youth received pre-employment training/summer job search assistance with many subsequently securing employment • Collaborated on a social host ordinance • Generated new community resources by landing a major new grant (SAMHSA) and taking part in a new foundation initiative
<p>Vision Coalition of El Dorado Hills</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Increased cooperation and clout of individual youth organizations and brought significant new resources/grants into the community • Focused public on the problems of underage drinking, tobacco and drug use—key data indicators suggest reduced usage • Youth voice and perspective help gain new public bus routes • New youth council created at a low-income housing development

¹⁸ These examples draw on self-reported data culled from the 2009-10 REACH annual reports prepared by the coalitions and on interviews and observations by the evaluation team. The examples are illustrative rather than an exhaustive list for each site. Activities and outcomes reflect work in which REACH resources played some role, although not necessarily the only or most significant role.

Table 2 | Continued

West Sacramento Youth Resource Coalition	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Revived city youth commission and built community support for the school board's student representative to be a voting member• Embedded youth participation in a neighborhood action group/park design• Partnered with a regional nonprofit to develop an urban farm stand• Youth research with UC Davis led to recommendations on transportation, community pride, education and recreation
Woodland Coalition for Youth	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Youth informed discussion of teen pregnancy, school budget cuts• REACH helped secure new after-school program grant• Strengthened links with UC Davis outreach and Chicana/o Studies Department• Connections formed during REACH helped infuse youth development principles at local high school

Sierra Health Foundation used REACH to raise the regional profile of youth development and youth civic engagement. While the scope of our evaluation did not permit systematic collection of evidence to support this finding, we can point to the following developments:

- REACH fostered positive stories about youth in multiple media outlets across the region, including television, radio, online and print.
- REACH grantees demonstrated their ongoing relationships and connections by coming together to plan the Grizzly Creek Ranch summer camp for youth in 2010, with only minimal support from the foundation.
- REACH contributed to a growing network of engaged youth and youth development professionals, as evidenced by growing participation in youth development conferences.



The Woodland Coalition for Youth partnered with the UC Davis Chicana/o Studies Department and artist Maceo Montoya to create murals in their community. Youth and adults worked together to win city approval for the projects and then designed and painted two murals, which both added beauty and curbed graffiti.



Lessons Learned

In this section, we identify lessons learned during REACH that might inform thinking and practice in the field. In keeping with the major objectives of REACH, we have grouped the lessons learned into three broad categories: 1) coalition development, 2) youth development and engagement (including lessons about emergent REACH emphases on parent engagement and youth-produced media), and 3) foundation practices to support community change. More detailed documentation of lessons learned in a few specific areas can be found in six issue briefs prepared by our evaluation team (see Appendix B).

Building a Community Youth Development Coalition

Through funding and technical assistance provided to grantees, REACH sought to create effective community youth development coalitions that could articulate shared goals, build appropriate and inclusive membership, be perceived as legitimate with the community, and mobilize community assets and resources to create intended change. Coalition development ended up looking very different in each community, driven by a number of key variables, including:

- whether a coalition had to be formed from scratch or could build upon pre-existing collaborative infrastructure;
- the nature of the lead agency, especially whether its primary expertise was in program delivery or in community organizing/collaboration;
- the organizational structures used to implement REACH activities, particularly whether it created and maintained separate youth councils/organizations or simply integrated youth into a mixed adult-youth coalition structure; and
- the extent to which coalition coordinators had strong relationships or ties within the community, and whether they lived within or outside the community.

The variety of coalition forms and settings provided a rich occasion for learning. Five key lessons stand out, concerning: 1) the need for coalition development expectations and approaches to take into account pre-existing community infrastructure and relationships, 2) predictable challenges or hurdles to overcome, 3) the importance and value in engaging schools in the work, 4) whether coalitions are really necessary to achieve certain goals, and 5) the wide range of skills and attributes needed when developing a community youth development coalition.

1. Coalition development efforts need to be adapted based upon the presence or absence of pre-existing collaborative infrastructure related to community youth development. Future work should be careful to distinguish two scenarios. The first scenario is a community where little collaborative infrastructure devoted to youth-related change previously existed. In this case, the coalition development approach can support the launch of a community change process, and can be intentional about building authentic youth voice into the initiative. However, the energy it takes to begin establishing collaborative infrastructure—such as a working coalition of adults and youth—may make it harder to achieve short-term community-scale outcomes. The challenge is to find ways to produce small wins as community capacity is being built.

The second scenario is a community where previous infrastructure or effort related to community youth development can be built upon. In this case, there is a greater likelihood that youth can be engaged in processes that contribute to short-term community outcomes. A related danger, however, is a greater chance that youth energy and voices will serve agendas that are not really their own, since agendas associated with the pre-existing community processes have already been set. This scenario may require especially diligent efforts to ensure that youth are not simply enlisted to support the agendas of adult leaders or particular agencies—an important pitfall to avoid in any youth-adult partnership strategy.

2. To be successful, coalitions must meet a number of challenges inherent in the developmental nature of the work. As identified in our study of REACH implementation, these include:

- establishing a strategic focus by selecting one or two key community-scale outcomes to change rather than attempting to do too many things or spreading resources thinly;
- anchoring collaboration in institutions and individuals with the requisite skills, experience and community legitimacy;
- developing a social mobilization strategy that is intentional about getting the right people involved, and devoting the extra time needed to fully engage underrepresented youth and adult populations;
- dealing directly with conflict while gaining energy from the emotions that motivate people to act and to stay committed—including the widespread desire to support young people; and
- continuous learning from your own experience and experiments, and sharing in the learning as part of broader networks.

3. Although they are frequently viewed as impenetrable bureaucracies that are hard to work with, schools were the most consistent REACH coalition partners, accounting for approximately one in four adult coalition participants (usually student services support staff such as a Healthy Start coordinator, director

COALITION PROFILE

Sacramento ACT Meadowview Partnership

This coalition of youth and adult leaders from churches, schools, neighborhoods and community-based organizations seeks to improve educational outcomes for students. They develop youth leaders by sharing community organizing tools and strategies, and by supporting youth advocacy and policy change work in schools and the broader community

Location: Large urban neighborhood of about 37,000 in Sacramento

School Ethnicities:

White	5%	African-American	24%
Latino	32%	Asian-American	33%

Median income: \$29,000—\$35,000

Lead Agency: Sacramento ACT (faith-based community organizing network)

Coalition Model: Community organizing

Strategic Focus: High school graduation rates, workforce development





The Youth Action Team at Luther Burbank High School is a diverse group of students who meet regularly to research, identify and advocate for positive changes in their school. The team is supported by the Sacramento ACT Meadowview Partnership.

of family support services, school counselor, etc).¹⁹ In the majority of REACH communities, coalition funds were used to expand existing student services at schools. Coalitions benefited by gaining access to youth and to school resources, including facilities, staff, data and community legitimacy. Schools gained partners to advocate for funding in the political arena, and community coalitions gain powerful institutional allies as they pursue more funding for youth development programs.

4. Many positive REACH outcomes did not necessarily require a coalition development process.

Communities should be very intentional in deciding whether to pursue the coalition development approach. Having a coalition in place can lead to many positive outcomes, and may be critical to particular types of outcomes, but it entails a substantial cost of time and resources. It may be that other strategies can be equally effective in realizing some key objectives that expand the broad menu of opportunities that support youth development in communities. For example, if the goal is simply to expand inter-organizational networking (local and regional), or provide training in

youth development principles, working partnerships are needed but not necessarily an integrated coalition with staff, a recruitment process, regular meetings, a coordinated agenda or strategy, etc.

5. Community youth development work requires a daunting range of competencies or capacities.

Key factors identified during REACH include:

- core staff rootedness, experience and reputation in the community;
- staff with experience in community organizing and with targeted youth populations, neighborhoods and/or communities;
- meeting facilitation skills (especially how to facilitate meetings with youth);
- basic concepts in systems/policy change and in asset-based community development;
- knowledge of strategies that support youth engagement/youth voice;
- ability to plan for organizational/fiscal sustainability;
- ability to engage with parents and caretakers across language and cultural differences;

¹⁹ For a more detailed discussion, see our REACH Issue Brief “Community-School Partnerships to Support Youth Development.”

- evaluation and data gathering for results-based accountability; and
- knowledge of the broader field, including the nature of successful approaches used in other communities.

In addition to screening potential grantees for these characteristics, our learning from REACH suggests the following lessons about grantee selection:

- If foundations want grantees to work with youth directly, or with particular cultural or other sub-populations of youth and families, they must screen carefully to ensure they fund groups or organizations that have the specific skills, networks and experience required, rather than simply the intention of hiring someone to begin doing that.
- While turnover in key program personnel should be expected, it can be partially avoided by looking to fund grantees where at least some key personnel have longstanding community roots, ties and networks, and live in the community where change is being sought.
- If coalition development is the goal, the wisdom of funding ongoing coalitions is questionable—either the funding will simply enhance what is already present or, at worst, it will superimpose new goals and processes in ways that create confusion or tension. If enhancement is the objective, ensuring that the full existing coalition has a shared vision of and commitment to next steps is critical. In funding

new coalitions, funders must temper expectations with a realistic view of the time and resources it will take to build a coalition and focus it on significant, shared and achievable goals.

Youth Development and Engagement

We have organized the lessons learned about youth development and engagement into three sections. The first section presents a set of five interrelated lessons that emerged from our comparative analysis of how the seven coalitions went about practicing youth engagement in the context of a community change initiative. The second section provides brief summaries of two special topics that became a focus of effort during REACH—parent engagement and youth-produced media. The third section considers lessons related to a topic of broader debate within the field of community youth development—whether and how to focus change strategies on particularly vulnerable youth and their concerns.

1. Lessons About Practicing Youth Engagement Within a Community Change Initiative

As documented earlier in this report, coalitions used a variety of approaches that succeeded in engaging youth with their community in meaningful ways. Looking across these experiences, five interrelated lessons emerge about the practice of youth engagement within a community change initiative. The five lessons—which build on one another—include:

COALITION PROFILE

Vision Coalition of El Dorado Hills

This coalition supports community efforts to promote youth-friendly programs and policies, to prevent and reduce youth substance abuse and to increase mental health services. The coalition includes leaders from diverse community sectors and provides opportunities for youth and adults to work together for change.

Location: Growing suburban community of 30,000 east of Sacramento

School Ethnicities:

White	84%	African-American	1%
Latino	4%	Asian-American	3%

Median Income: \$92,000

Lead Agency: Vision Coalition of El Dorado Hills

Coalition Model: Hub for collaboration, grant seeking and regranting

Strategic Focus: Drug and alcohol abuse prevention



A. Adult supporters' capacity and commitment is more important to successful youth engagement than either the program structure or the institutional home. Although the context can enable or challenge the work, it is the particular character, background, style and approach of the adults who work directly with youth that matters most. This lesson was made particularly evident during REACH due to the turnover in key staff. The same institutional setting or program structure that worked well for engaging youth under the leadership of one adult often worked less well under another.

B. One particularly important capacity of strong adult supporters of youth is the ability to nurture an ongoing cycle of action and reflection that gradually builds youth skills, knowledge and confidence.

Whatever youth engagement approaches are used, taking the time to be in intentional conversation with youth before, during and after activities is important. The most impressive youth engagement practices we witnessed engaged youth in thinking critically about what they were doing, why and what could be learned from the results. The idea was not just to fill youth calendars with things to do, but to involve youth in the thinking process that accompanies community work. The community organizing approach used in Meadowview was a particularly exemplary model in this regard—it features deliberate debriefing after each significant activity (or “action”) during which lessons about power and change are conveyed and plans for future actions begin to be discussed.

C. It takes time and patience to engage in this incremental work of building strong relationships with youth—when staff must couple this work with the related demands of building organizational relationships and partnerships, they can easily become overloaded. Funders and community youth development practitioners need to anticipate the time required to facilitate authentic youth engagement. Overload can quickly ensue when the same staff person is tasked both with running a youth group and with developing coalition partners to create community change strategies. This issue can become even more acute given the extra time it takes to build the trust and support the engagement of more vulnerable youth.

D. Coupling youth engagement and community change is difficult. While the Gambone, Klein and Connell (2002) theory of change offers a useful framework for increasing developmental supports for youth at a community scale, it is less explicit or clear about why and how youth might be engaged in this process. Lacking an explicit conceptual rationale from the funder-adopted framework to explain why it is important to engage youth in a community change strategy for youth development, REACH grantees tended—particularly in the early stages of the program—to conceptualize youth engagement and community change as separate tasks. Some coalitions tilted their energies toward youth engagement, others toward community change, but all struggled to accomplish the difficult task of putting the two together.

COALITION PROFILE

West Sacramento Youth Resource Coalition

This coalition nurtures youth leaders through the Sactown Heroes, a group that pursues multiple opportunities for young people to develop leadership and life skills. They work with community organizations such as city government, neighborhood associations, schools and nonprofits to promote policies, programs and planning that support youth.

Location: City of 40,000 just west of Sacramento

School Ethnicities:

White	39%	African-American	6%
Latino	40%	Asian-American	9%

Median Income: \$27,000-\$36,000

Lead Agency: CommuniCare Health Centers (nonprofit health care provider)

Coalition Model: Youth group connected to youth/adult coalition

Strategic Focus: Increase youth voice in local governance





Having identified a lack of youth art opportunities in their community, the South Sacramento Coalition for Future Leaders created a monthly Art Walk for children, youth and their families. Held each third Thursday at the community library, the event features hands-on workshops, art showcases and live music.



There were pros and cons to fostering youth engagement through existing youth-serving organizations (which get youth engaged more quickly, but with less of a community change focus if that was not already their mission) vs. setting up a new youth program in association with the coalition (which took longer but was more likely to engage youth in community improvement strategies).

The most successful efforts to merge youth engagement with community change had two common features. First, they used a community organizing approach that emphasized careful listening to youth and patient coaching about the nature of public policy and the skills needed to advocate for policy change. Second, the leaders of the effort were not only experienced community organizers themselves, but had spent a good deal of time on the ground in a particular community. This familiarity not only helped them identify strategic community change opportunities, it also gave them time to build relationships with the young people engaged with the coalition. Neither of these two features by themselves appears to be sufficient. Even experienced and skilled organizers struggle to engage youth meaningfully if their time in the community is limited to episodic coaching opportunities. Likewise, coalition leaders who are familiar with the community and spend lots of time on the ground still

will be hard pressed to produce youth-led community change without skills in community organizing and an understanding of policy and power dynamics.

E. Developing and sustaining a focused community change strategy can provide clarity about how and why to engage youth, but it doesn't necessarily respond to what matters most to youth. As the coalitions gained increased clarity of focus with their “gold medal” strategies, they were able to sharpen the focus of their youth engagement activities. Thus, youth we interviewed at the end of the program could readily tell us what changes they were working on in the community and what specific roles they were playing. However, we also noted that many of the chosen strategies did little to address the more challenging community conditions that youth had articulated in the planning phase of the REACH process, and that were revealed by the REACH pilot youth survey.²⁰ For example, in the planning process youth often pointed to violence, police harassment and safety as key problems, yet in most cases the eventual work of the coalitions did relatively little to address these issues.

²⁰ In Fall 2009, the UC Davis California Communities Program administered a pilot youth survey to 483 7th- and 8th-grade students in six localities across the Sacramento region. This survey—focused on learning about 12- to 14-year-olds' experiences of key community developmental supports—suggests that disparities in youth outcomes are mirrored by disparities in young people's opportunities. Surveys were administered through schools using strategies aimed at reaching samples reflective of student diversity in terms of race, gender, immigration experience and academic performance.



With a goal to influence policymakers, youth from the Rancho Cordova Children, Youth and Family Collaborative went to the State Capitol to let their voices be heard about potential cuts to school budgets. Members of the coalition's Youth Advisory Council met with their elected officials to discuss why the issue was important to youth.

This might be explained by the high turnover of youth coalition coordinators early in the REACH program, since they were the primary source of continuity between the planning phase and implementation phase of REACH. But it also seemed to reflect a more general tendency for adults to challenge or evade youth depictions of their communities. In a few cases, we witnessed meetings during which adults explicitly challenged the youth depiction of disturbing levels of youth violence. It was hard to tell if this was an actual dispute about the facts or simply a reluctance on the part of some adults—particularly public officials—to have disturbing facts about the community aired publicly.

2. Parent Engagement and Youth-Produced Media as Emerging Strategies

Two topics emerged during REACH that were not anticipated in the original design, but which played important roles in the overall strategy linking youth engagement to community change. The first was a youth media effort led by a technical assistance provider—the Center for Community School Partnerships at UC Davis. The second was the introduction of additional funding and an intentional learning community to support parent engagement. A more detailed description and assessment of each of these activities is available in our REACH Issue Brief Series. Here, we share the key overall lessons learned for each topic.

A. To enhance a community change effort, youth-produced media projects must have a strategy for using the media product to make change. Finding an audience for youth-produced media beyond the parents, families and other significant people in

the lives of youth can be difficult (Dahl, 2009), but distributing these stories is essential if the goal is to educate, advocate or mobilize. To the extent possible, organizers/trainers should look beyond the technical lessons associated with media production and include activities that develop skills in community organizing, such as one-on-one interviews to identify problems and leaders, power analysis, enlisting allies and political strategy.

B. Parents should never be taken for granted or treated as an afterthought in designing community youth development programs or initiatives. The initial REACH design did not explicitly address parent engagement, but the need to rectify this omission soon emerged. The foundation responded by making small supplemental grants of \$15,000 available to each coalition. Coalitions used the funds for four primary purposes: 1) activities to expand and deepen social connections and relationships, 2) parent training and education, 3) fostering direct parental engagement in the work of the coalition, and 4) fostering direct parental engagement with their children's schools. Each approach demonstrated promise, and parent engagement proved particularly important for parents of low socioeconomic status—especially immigrants and/or non-English speakers. Often disconnected from schools or other community institutions, these parents reported acquiring better understanding of the U.S. educational system and knowledge about community resources that would enable them to better support their children. All parents reported enjoying activities in which they could socialize with other parents and their youth, building social connections and sharing their common concerns or joys.

3. Engaging Vulnerable Youth and Their Concerns²¹

Like many community youth development efforts, the REACH Program called upon grantees to address the needs of all youth. While grantees were selected to reflect the diversity of communities in the region and were encouraged to recruit youth reflecting the diversity within those communities, they were not asked in particular to reach out to their most vulnerable youth populations. In the United States, these vulnerable youth are disproportionately economically poor, youth of color, immigrant youth, LGBT youth and/or youth who have sustained experience with foster care, homelessness or the juvenile justice system. Across REACH, involvement of these previously un/under-engaged youth was limited, albeit with important variation across places and times.

Grantees that did engage such youth over time offer important lessons about how to create the types of safe, supportive and meaningful settings that promoted the ongoing participation and leadership of vulnerable youth. Key elements of their success included: intentionality and commitment; local knowledge of and connections to vulnerable populations; adult allies with key capacities, resources and a stable presence over time; and an asset-based approach that builds on the knowledge, skills and aspirations of vulnerable youth.

The REACH Program offers both a cautionary note and powerful lessons with respect to engaging under-represented youth populations in community youth development. Like other education and youth development efforts, REACH illustrates that an emphasis on

servicing all youth in the context of community youth development does not necessarily result in a focus on vulnerable youth populations' interests, needs and assets. On the other hand, REACH grantees that fostered the leadership of more vulnerable youth showed the benefits of their participation and insight.

Recommendations for Community Youth Development Funders

The REACH experience suggests three broader and more fundamental considerations facing foundations seeking to support community youth development. These involve:

- embracing the developmental nature of the work;
- clarifying the vision/values underlying the intended changes; and
- thinking carefully about the specific type of policy change work to be pursued.

1. Embrace the Developmental Nature of the Work

As an extended experiment in linking youth development and community change, the foundation appropriately treated REACH as a learning initiative. REACH showed that implementing a learning initiative requires running upstream against understandings that often are presumed in funder/grantee relationships. Table 3 depicts the alternative frames of mind.

Table 3 | What Foundation Learning Initiatives Must Face

<i>Learning often requires:</i>	<i>But grantees typically:</i>
Failure/and thus tolerance for failure	Try to put their best foot forward at all times, discounting or hiding failures
Willingness to experiment	Stick with what is known to succeed so they can show success
Debate and the constructive clash of ideas	Toe the company line lest they invite unwanted scrutiny
Patient, open-ended deliberation and reflection based on experience	Engage in a frantic scramble to meet preset deliverables, often because they have promised to do too much for too little

²¹ For a more detailed discussion of engaging vulnerable youth, see our Issue Brief "Toward Making Good on All Youth: Engaging Underrepresented Youth Populations in Community Youth Development."



With a focus on service learning, the Galt Area Youth Coalition provides opportunities for students to take what they learn in the classroom and apply it in the community, such as the Cosumnes River Preserve Visitor Center Landscape Project, shown here.

These distinctions are particularly appropriate considerations when a foundation initiative is characterized by one or more of the following:²²

- the bold scope of the changes sought;
- relatively high levels of uncertainty, such that outcomes are difficult to predict in advance and the values and interests of key stakeholders vary;
- complexity of the developmental processes required, with multiple systems and subsystems involved, and a variety of elements and actors that must adapt to each other in a responsive fashion; and
- need for ongoing adaptation and evolution, since the work takes place in fast-moving environments and amid unavoidable tensions and tradeoffs.

When these conditions exist, the accountability system should emphasize peer learning and continuous improvement with respect to overarching objectives, rather than adherence to preset work plans. It may also require funders to be part of the conversation in a more deliberate and sustained fashion, such as in the embedded funders approach (Brown, et.al. 2006; Robinson 2005). As Sievers (2010, p. 131) notes, this

²² The ideas in this section draw heavily on the work of Michael Quinn Patton, particularly his recent work *Developmental Evaluation* (2010).

will mean less reliance on market-like models that promise “increments of measurable outcomes that can be correlated with increments of investment” and more on practical local knowledge that can readily adapt to complex community conditions and changing circumstances.

By casting REACH as a learning initiative, and by allowing grantees considerable freedom to adapt their work to the local community context, Sierra Health Foundation took significant steps in this direction. Future initiatives can build on this experience by considering one or more of the following:

- Engaging grantees explicitly in an experimentation process. Initial work plans would reflect the “experiment” the grantee planned to undertake, their hoped-for outcomes, and a set of intermediate indicators they would use to assess whether a given strategy was working or not. This might open the door for a more honest conversation about what did/didn’t work, the potential for failure, etc.
- Putting more emphasis on the willingness of key stakeholders to be meaningful contributors to an ongoing conversation about evolving goals and strategies, and less emphasis on frameworks, logic models or evaluation plans. At the same time, insist that grantees comply in a timely fashion with reality testing instruments (e.g. rapid response surveys, interviews, requests for on-site observations, participatory data collection, etc.) and that they be fully engaged in ongoing reflection and deliberation with each other, with advisors/coaches and with foundation staff.
- In supporting the work, put less emphasis on training by experts and more on structuring peer learning opportunities, and providing ongoing coaching by experienced change agents with access to information about similar efforts statewide and nationally.
- Review the literature and the work of other innovators for effective general principles and new ideas, but with the understanding that these will need to be adapted to new contexts (rather than seeking rote application of “best practices”). If a conceptual

framework is adopted to guide the initiative, be very careful that the framework and principles are aligned.

- Shift the primary responsibility for evaluation from external evaluators to an embedded team (including experienced researchers/evaluators who have spent time thinking about what counts as good evidence and are familiar with a variety of data collection tools). The team should be committed to asking tough questions about whether the effort is being true to its vision and values, whether there is credible evidence that the work is changing reality in desired ways, what new and emerging factors need to be taken into account, etc.

2. Clarify the Vision and Values Underlying the Approach to Youth Engagement and Systems/Policy Change

Lest the developmental process become unmoored, there is a corresponding need to repeatedly articulate the vision and values guiding the work. For example, one might emphasize the desire to reduce dramatic disparities in youth well-being or to change the systems that care for youth in particular need of support (e.g. foster care, juvenile justice).

REACH suggests that it is quite difficult—though absolutely critical—to pair together high quality youth engagement with broad and effective community/policy/systems change. Foundations need to find a way to put one of these objectives in the foreground of its vision for innovation, without letting go of the need to

connect both objectives in a meaningful way. Otherwise, the REACH experience showed that grantees tended to do one or the other well, but struggle to bring the two together (at least within the timeline of the REACH Community Action grant).

In clarifying the vision and values that will undergird future work, consider the following possibilities as starting points:

- a core presumption that youth have unique perspectives that can improve judgments about what should be done in a variety of programs, systems and community settings;
- a recognition that young people are likely to bring varying perspectives on these programs, systems and community settings based on how well they, their families and their social networks have been supported by them, and that in most communities different youth populations experience disparate and inequitable opportunities and outcomes;
- a goal to achieve significant change in how programs operate, communities plan, policies are designed, etc.;
- a plan to support youth with adult allies who can marshal their insight, energy, skill, knowledge and networks; and
- attention to power differentials between adults and youth, as well as among different youth populations based on demographics, geography and roles.

COALITION PROFILE

Woodland Coalition for Youth

This group of youth, parents and public and private agencies is working together for systems change for Woodland youth. The coalition promotes youth voice, positive educational and social connections and a youth development orientation, so that youth-serving organizations become more inclusive and effective and local youth can become successful adults.

Location: City of 52,000 just northwest of Sacramento

School Ethnicities:

White	36%	African-American	1%
Latino	56%	Asian-American	4%

Median Income: \$37,000-\$47,000

Lead Agency: Yolo Family Resource Center

Coalition Model: Youth group connected to youth/adult coalition

Strategic Focus: Teen pregnancy prevention, youth advocacy



3. Be Clear About the Type of Policy Change Work to be Pursued

By linking local actors through common training, activities and peer-learning, REACH laid a partial foundation for a regional learning network. Although such a network could be the incubator for coordinated policy work or regional change strategies, that work is fundamentally different and in many ways more difficult—requiring a different intensity of strategic focus, ally development and mutual commitment.

Regardless of its guiding vision, all policy or systems change work requires a specific focus, sustained engagement and some form of organized power or influence. In REACH there was a tendency to direct grantees to make policy or systems changes, but with little clarity about the type or types of policy work that were expected or possible, or what levers for change were present. Among the options that need to be considered in framing policy work are whether to:

- shape public perceptions or the content of the public agenda vs. organizing to influence pressing legislation or regulation;
- introduce new legislation vs. changing the rules and regulations by which legislation is implemented vs. creating effective workarounds or practices that adapt policy to local circumstances;
- expand the resource pie vs. redirecting how existing resources are deployed; or
- strengthen the existing safety net vs. changing the odds that youth will need it.

Another important consideration in policy work is whether to pursue an insider or outsider strategy, or some combination. A variety of specific action strategies might be considered based on their consistency with the policy change focus and the underlying vision and values. For example:

- building an “insider” network of service providers committed to systems change and combining their efforts with street outreach that elicits youth perspectives on how systems affect them and that mobilizes community cultural wealth;

- facilitating an “outsider” community organizing strategy that builds knowledge and power among youth and their families to advocate for/inspire change;
- institutionalizing youth reflection on existing data and programs by involving youth in program and policy evaluation; and
- building organizational infrastructure required to support any/all of the above.

Final Thoughts

REACH community stakeholders generally were effusive in praise for how the foundation managed the program. They particularly appreciated the time the foundation staff took to learn about their particular communities and to build relationships with local youth and adults. They valued the extensive foundation investment in providing technical assistance and the flexibility in adapting that assistance and other aspects of the grant as time, new learning and changing circumstances dictated.

REACH realized many of its intended outcomes, while sparking learning about the many challenges inherent in the work. The need to nurture youth by providing leadership opportunities and supportive environments is a common challenge in all communities. REACH provided an occasion to sharpen our ideas for how to accomplish this task. With gratitude for the willingness of REACH stakeholders to share their thoughts and reflections, we hope this report contributes to the ongoing development of more effective and strategic youth initiatives.

Acknowledgments

We wish to express our gratitude to the REACH coalition coordinators and to members of the technical assistance team whose ready cooperation and assistance has made our work much easier. All of them have been generous with their time and have responded readily to our many requests for assistance. All told, more than 200 adults and 80 youth from seven communities in the Greater Sacramento region supported this report by sharing perceptive reflections in open-ended interviews, many on multiple occasions.

We are grateful to Sierra Health Foundation for the opportunity to undertake this evaluation. President and CEO Chet Hewitt and the Sierra Health board of directors have committed themselves to REACH in order to improve conditions for youth in the Greater Sacramento region. We are especially thankful for the support of our work provided by Director of Program Investments Diane Littlefield, Program Officer Matt Cervantes and former Vice President Dorothy Meehan. They helped create a context in which honest reflection on the strengths and weaknesses of the program is valued.

At See Change Evaluation, Melanie Moore Kubo supported evaluation design, year one data collection and our interim evaluation report, and Ashley McKenna and Melissa Saphir provided help with interviews and with the administration and analysis of a related youth survey. Two former members of our evaluation team, Leslie Cooksy and Cathy Lemp, made major contributions early in our work. At UC Davis, John Jones at the Center for Community School Partnerships provided valuable assistance in maintaining the meeting attendance data set, and Carrie Matthews contributed a variety of assistance to our team. We also have received helpful advice from our evaluation advisory committee, including Marc Braverman of Oregon State University, Leslie Cooksy of University of Delaware, Elizabeth Miller of UC Davis Medical Center, and Patsy Eubanks Owens and Dina Okamoto of UC Davis.

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Appendices

Appendix A. Coalition Profiles

Data note: School Ethnicities represent the percentage of four major racial/ethnic groups in area public schools (from California Department of Education, 2005-2006 school year; Median Incomes are from the 2000 census (when a range is presented it represents the low and high range among multiple zip codes included in the coalition footprint area).

Galt Area Youth Coalition

Location:	City of 28,000 and surrounding unincorporated communities south of Sacramento
School Ethnicities:	White 46% Latino 46% African-American 2% Asian-American 2%
Median Income:	\$30,000-\$73,000
Lead Agency:	Galt Joint Union Elementary School District
Coalition Model:	Activity hub for students from multiple schools
Strategic Focus:	Developing youth master plan, service learning

Rancho Cordova Children, Youth and Family Collaborative

Location:	Newly incorporated city of about 53,000 just east of Sacramento
School Ethnicities:	White 50% Latino 23% African-American 16% Asian-American 6%
Median Income:	\$46,000
Lead Agency:	Folsom Cordova Community Partnership (service agency)
Coalition Model:	After-school youth group tied to pre-existing collaborative
Strategic Focus:	Youth safety

Sacramento ACT Meadowview Partnership

Location:	Large urban neighborhood of about 37,000 in Sacramento
School Ethnicities:	White 5% Latino 32% African-American 24% Asian-American 33%
Median Income:	\$29,000-\$35,000
Lead Agency:	Sacramento ACT (faith-based community organizing network)
Coalition Model:	Community organizing
Strategic Focus:	High school graduation rates, workforce development

South Sacramento Coalition for Future Leaders

Location:	Large urban neighborhood of about 73,000 in Sacramento
School Ethnicities:	White 14% Latino 36% African-American 15% Asian-American 30%
Median Income:	\$27,000-\$32,000
Lead Agency:	Sacramento Mutual Housing Association
Coalition Model:	Adult and youth committees on priority topics
Strategic Focus:	Youth arts, safety, mentoring, jobs

Vision Coalition of El Dorado Hills

Location:	Growing suburban community of 30,000 east of Sacramento
School Ethnicities:	White 84% Latino 4% African-American 1% Asian-American 3%
Median Income:	\$92,000
Lead Agency:	Vision Coalition of El Dorado Hills
Coalition Model:	Hub for collaboration, grant seeking and regranteeing
Strategic Focus:	Drug and alcohol abuse prevention

West Sacramento Youth Resource Coalition

Location:	City of 40,000 just west of Sacramento
School Ethnicities:	White 39% Latino 40% African-American 6% Asian-American 9%
Median Income:	\$27,000-\$36,000
Lead Agency:	CommuniCare Health Centers (nonprofit health care provider)
Coalition Model:	Youth group connected to youth/adult coalition
Strategic Focus:	Increase youth voice in local governance

Woodland Coalition for Youth

Location:	City of 52,000 just northwest of Sacramento
School Ethnicities:	White 36% Latino 56% African-American 1% Asian-American 4%
Median Income:	\$37,000-\$47,000
Lead Agency:	Yolo Family Resource Center
Coalition Model:	Youth group connected to youth/adult coalition
Strategic Focus:	Teen pregnancy prevention, youth advocacy

Appendix B. REACH Issue Briefs

Our evaluation team has prepared issue briefs to share outcomes and lessons on topics of particular interest that arose during REACH. The six issue briefs are available at www.sierrahealth.org under Resources and include:

- *Benefits and Challenges in Building a Community Youth Development Coalition*
- *Community-School Partnerships to Support Youth Development*
- *Youth-Produced Media in Community Change Efforts*
- *Engaging Parents in a Community Youth Development Initiative*
- *Using a Camp to Bolster Youth-driven Community Change*
- *Toward Making Good on All Youth: Engaging Underrepresented Youth Populations in Community Youth Development*

Appendix C. REACH External Evaluation Activities

(Totals read from top to bottom)

Coalition	Adult Interviews	Youth Interviews	Observations of meetings and events
El Dorado Hills	32	5	17
Galt	41	18	35
Meadowview	34	14	33
Rancho Cordova	28	13	34
South Sacramento	34	11	43
West Sacramento	20	8	25
Woodland	31	18	71
All coalition totals	220	87	258
Sierra Health Foundation	16	-	40
Technical Assistance Team	23	-	25
All foundation totals	39	-	65
Totals	259	87	323

Appendix D. REACH Data Sources and Methods

This analysis draws on intensive fieldwork in the seven implementing communities, with more than 300 meeting and event observations and more than 300 reflective interviews conducted by our evaluation team during and near the end of the program. All interviews were designed to document perspectives from different participants about coalition development, youth engagement, community change, and foundation practices and technical assistance provision.

In addition, interviews were conducted with community members to support the development of a series of issue briefs. Respondents included school partners/coordinators, adult allies, parents, city officials, law enforcement and business professionals. Additional data collected included attendance data, youth surveys, a mapping survey, literature review, document review, review of digital stories and observation of community meetings.

These data sources (described in more detail in the table on page 32) were analyzed by evaluation team members to identify common themes, patterns, tensions, outcomes and challenges. We used a variety of qualitative data analysis techniques, including coding and content analysis of interview transcripts and meeting observation notes, cross-case analytic comparisons, and critique of tentative findings both by members of the evaluation team and by REACH stakeholders who were invited to comment on draft reports. The process was iterative, beginning with early team meetings and informal reports to the foundation during the first year of our work, continuing in the process that led to our interim evaluation report in February 2009, and then culminating in this final report.

Respondent Type	Interview/Focus Group Design
Coordinators and Staff	<p>Between 2007 and 2010, seven protocols were developed to conduct in-person and telephone interviews with REACH coordinators from all seven coalitions.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Pre-interviews held during the planning phase collected information about REACH and experiences with evaluation (Spring 2007). • Initial interviews captured professional background and experiences, coalition structure and goals, and youth participation (Fall 2007). • Exit interviews with coordinators who departed their positions captured perspectives about significant accomplishments and challenges (as needed). • Interviews with new coordinators captured professional background and perspectives about REACH (as needed). • Interim interviews captured successes and challenges related to coalition development, youth development, community change and foundation/TA practices (Summer 2008). • Midterm interviews captured changes in coalition strategies, sustainability plans, and to probe more deeply about progress and next steps (Summer 2009). • Final interviews captured perspectives on outcomes for youth participants, organizational practices and norms, and community systems (Spring 2010).
Adult Coalition Members	<p>Between 2007 and 2010, three protocols were developed to conduct in-person and telephone interviews with REACH coalition members from all seven coalitions.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Initial interviews captured organizational background, nature of involvement with coalition, community conditions, coalition background, youth involvement and steps toward community change (Fall 2007). • Interim interviews captured organizational background, nature of coalition involvement, and perspectives about coalition development, youth development and steps toward community change (Summer 2008). • Final interviews captured perspectives on outcomes for youth participants, organizational practices and norms, and community change (Spring 2010).
Youth Coalition Members	<p>Between 2007 and 2010, two protocols were developed to conduct two sets of in-person and telephone interviews and one focus group with REACH youth participants from all seven coalitions.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Interim interviews captured background data, coalition roles and responsibilities, and assessment of experience (Summer 2008). • Focus groups captured youth participation in and relevance of coalition activities to youth, perspectives about youth-adult relationships, and individual and community outcomes (Winter 2010).
Technical Assistance Providers	<p>Between 2007 and 2010, three protocols were developed to conduct telephone and in-person interviews with members of the technical assistance teams.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • During the evaluation design phase, providers were asked what they wanted to learn from the evaluation (April 2007). • Interim interviews captured perspectives about the provision of TA, successes and challenges delivering TA, and grantee progress in meeting goals and objectives (Summer 2008). • Final interviews captured perspectives about successes and challenges and lessons learned (Spring 2010).
Sierra Health Foundation Staff and Board Members	<p>Between 2007 and 2010, four protocols were developed to conduct telephone and in-person interviews with Sierra Health Foundation staff and board members:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Interviews conducted during the design phase captured perspectives about what they hoped to learn from the evaluation, the REACH strategy, board engagement in the program, benchmarks and experiences with evaluations (Spring 2007). • Interim interviews captured perspectives about the successes and challenges related to the program and progress toward meeting foundation goals (2008). • Midterm interviews captured perspectives about successes and challenges and future funding strategies (Fall 2009). • Final interviews captured perspectives about successes and challenges, managing and delivering technical assistance, and how lessons from REACH shape future strategies and goals. (Spring 2010).

California Communities Program, UC Davis

The evaluation of the REACH Youth Program was conducted under the auspices of the California Communities Program (CCP), a statewide University of California Cooperative Extension program affiliated with the Human and Community Development Department at UC Davis. CCP conducts research and evaluation projects on cutting-edge issues affecting California communities, with a focus on community governance, leadership and economic development. For the past 12 years we have conducted major, multiyear evaluations of collaborative community initiatives for state government, private foundations and community-based nonprofit organizations on topics such as workforce development, healthy communities and civic engagement. Our approach recognizes the wide diversity of community settings and emphasizes the need to take community context into account by paying close attention to local dynamics, meanings and perspectives. For more information, visit the CCP web site, <http://groups.ucanr.org/CCP/index.cfm>.



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