



LEARNING FROM THE FOUNDATION CONSORTIUM
FOR CALIFORNIA'S CHILDREN & YOUTH:

Foundation-Government Partnerships

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POLICY BRIEF

WhatWorks

The Foundation Consortium for California's Children & Youth is closing after fourteen years. This brave experiment, unlike any other in the nation, served California from 1991–2005, left behind many accomplishments and birthed three new entities. This policy brief is the second in a two-part series that explores the Consortium's experience. The first brief, "Foundation Collaboration in Action" is intended as a guide for those interested in starting and sustaining foundation collaborations. It discusses the Consortium as a foundation collaboration and focuses on critical success factors as well as the reasons for its eventual demise.

This brief examines the Consortium's primary strategy, foundation-government partnership. It is written primarily for a foundation audience, but public sector officials will find it informative. It begins with the story of the Consortium, then goes on to describe the benefits of foundation-government partnerships, discuss evaluation challenges, and identify factors associated with success. The heart of the brief presents key lessons. It closes with some pointers on starting a partnership.

SECOND OF TWO BRIEFS

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The Foundation Consortium would like to thank everyone who has helped us over the years improve outcomes for California's children and youth. Individually and in new groups, we will continue to work for positive change in our communities and hope you will do the same.

**Dear Friends of the Foundation Consortium for
California's Children & Youth,**

As most of you know by now, the Foundation Consortium will close its doors after over 14 years of successful work on December 23, 2005.

That means you are now reading our last What Works Policy Brief. If we counted right, this is brief number fourteen. What began with a grant from The California Wellness Foundation for a series of four such publications in 1998 became the Consortium's primary print publication, always focusing on what we care about most: good policies and their implementation. We would like to thank all of the authors and review teams for their fine work and you, the readers, for your loyalty and support throughout the past seven years.

While the Foundation Consortium will end, many of its members will continue to work together in different ways to help California's children be safe, healthy and learning each day. The ending of the Consortium is in no way a reflection of diminished member commitment to their own priorities and many of those the Consortium has adopted, e.g. After-School, Child Welfare and Family Support.

The Consortium's website will stay alive until June 2006. Here you can find information on our program areas (e.g., go-to places), and the whereabouts and contact information of our staff. All of our policy briefs are available for download as well. Please visit www.foundationconsortium.org.

Last, but not least, I would like to thank the Board of Directors, our partners, consultants and staff for their ongoing support and work. Without you, the Foundation Consortium, would not have been able to be one the most successful and longest-lasting foundation-governed pooled funds in the country.

Judith K. Chynoweth
Executive Director
Foundation Consortium for California's Children & Youth



What Are the Benefits of Foundation-Government Partnership?

Leverage of Foundation Funds

Foundation-government partnerships have a number of benefits for foundations, for government and for the individuals, families or communities the partnership seeks to help. For foundations, the most alluring (and challenging) benefit is the ability **to leverage public resources toward a desired policy goal.**

Through the Healthy Start partnership, Consortium member foundations encouraged the expenditure of \$10 million public dollars (SB620) for a statewide program strategy they themselves were supporting on a small scale. Furthermore, a Consortium expenditure of less than a million yielded hundreds of millions of federal dollars for expanded children's services through the LEA MediCal Billing Option. In the Child Welfare Partnership, Consortium members leveraged \$3.2 million in targeted grants from the Marguerite Casey Foundation and the California Endowment into approximately \$6.5 million for a capacity-building process to help 40 counties implement a new response to families reported to the child abuse hotline. In 2005, AB2496 was passed to institutionalize the ability of foundations to grant money to government to match federal dollars for specific and allowable purposes. This would not have happened without a foundation-government partnership.

Quality Policy Implementation

Through partnerships, foundations and governments can ensure **quality implementation of policies they support.** The California After School Partnership of the Foundation Consortium and the California Department of Education created a brand new approach to building quality programs at the local level. Instead of supporting a centralized office to develop and deliver periodic trainings to diverse sites throughout the state, the partnership developed a decentralized system of field

support. This system brought hands-on coaching to program sites — a “guide by the side.” In 11 regions in the state, it funded “leads” who are accountable for program quality, broker local training and provide technical assistance and peer support. It designated and funded regional learning centers that model quality programs and serve the other sites in their region as peer learning centers.

Foundation-government partnerships can **help foundations and their government partners learn to implement challenging policies.**

Proposition 10 required local commissions to include diverse groups in their planning and decision-making and to be accountable for results. Through partnering with The Foundation Consortium, four First 5 county commissions developed processes that included a highly diverse group of community residents and providers. They also developed accountability systems for their grantees that focused on participant results and program performance measures.

Improved Public Systems

A third benefit is **improvement of public systems.** The Foundation Consortium partnered with the California Department of Social Services to support proposed improvements in the child welfare system. Through this partnership 40 counties began implementation of differential response,¹ a more individualized response to families reported to the child welfare system. Local inter-disciplinary, inter-agency teams around the state are working to improve outcomes of youth transitioning out of foster care. Partnerships between county welfare agencies and community-based agencies are taking joint action to provide families with the help they need before abuse and neglect occurs. Finally, proactive and positive communications about child welfare activities are being developed and coordinated at the state and county level.

Policy and Program Integration

Partnerships **promote policy and program integration** across department and discipline lines. The Consortium Policy Academies supported 19 county inter-agency teams to develop more comprehensive child and family policy. The Child Welfare Partnership formed a state interagency team (SIT) at the deputy level to improve outcomes for shared populations of children and families. The SIT develops and implements integrated state-level policy across multiple agencies including social services, alcohol and drug abuse prevention, physical and mental health, education, employment and training, developmental services and the Attorney General.

Additional Resources

For government, the most compelling benefit is **securing resources for critical activities that have not been publicly funded**. For example, the California Department of Education did not receive adequate funds from the state to support technical assistance for local after school programs when the After School Education and Safety Act passed. Public funds for administering the Act also were scant. Foundation resources helped with both of these shortfalls as well as provided considerable strategic advice and expertise. The California Department of Social Services had no state resources to support county capacity building for differential response. The partnership enabled private foundation dollars to be used as a match for federal title IVE funds to support the Breakthrough Series Collaborative that provided technical support to counties.

Advocacy

A second but equally powerful benefit to government is the voice of outsiders — the foundations — **pushing for policy implementation and accountability already desired by government administrators**. The Child Welfare Partnership helped to transition the child welfare redesign recommendations from a Democrat to a Republican administration. The Partnership provided much needed focus and continuity during the transition and persistently reminded public partners of their longer-term strategic goals.

Prevention

Finally, foundation-government partnerships enable government **to stretch their prevention dollars**. Publicly funded services are generally for individuals and families with the most severe, chronic or complicated challenges. The Public-Private Family Support Funders Group built the capacity of community-based neighborhood family centers to strengthen and sustain their programs. This effort could not have been funded without the resources and technical expertise of the Consortium and its members.

Government partners have highly valued the Consortium for its comprehensive policy perspective, consistent push for accountability, and willingness to spend time and money to solve implementation challenges.

There are times, however, when a foundation-government partnership does not make sense. Partnerships break down when foundations advocate for a policy not supported by their government partners. For example, towards the end of the Healthy Start partnership, the Foundation Consortium pushed for the accomplishment of the third partnership objective: a system of comprehensive, integrated school-linked services. The government partners were not really interested in this policy objective, and the more the Consortium reminded their partners that this objective was a part of the partnership agreement, the more uncomfortable and less productive the overall partnership became.

Foundation-government partnerships are **not** indicated as a strategy when either party wishes to exercise a high level of control over activities or when either party is in a hurry. Partnerships take time to develop even when both sides have partnership experience. Rushing to action undermines the long-term success of partnerships.



THE FOUNDATION CONSORTIUM FOR CALIFORNIA'S CHILDREN & YOUTH
— A STORY OF ACCOMPLISHMENTS

opportunity

In January 1992, the Chief Executive Officers of eight California foundations signed an Agreement in Principle with Governor Pete Wilson and the State Superintendent of Public Instruction, William Honig.

The agreement was a public-private partnership to support and influence public policy for children and families. Specifically, the partnership was designed to support the implementation of Healthy Start (SB620), a discretionary grant for school districts to build comprehensive, integrated, school-linked services in elementary schools throughout California. The first objective of the partnership was to support the development and implementation of Healthy Start. The second was to identify and secure a source of ongoing funding for Healthy Start sites once the three-year state grant period expired. The third and most difficult objective was to develop a statewide system of comprehensive, integrated support services for children and their families. The state contribution to the partnership included administration, training for program development and grants to local districts — a total expense of about \$10 million a year. The Foundation Consortium contributed \$1.7 million per year for three years to support a statewide evaluation and to develop the Local Education Agency MediCal Billing Option, a local match for the federal Medicaid funding stream.

Many lessons in public-private collaboration were learned in this first partnership. The results were well worth the risks to both partners. Healthy Start² has a proven track record in improving outcomes for children and their families in California. Though Healthy Start state funding has been eliminated, many Healthy Start programs remain strong and vibrant in their communities, supported by a combination of funds from school districts, counties and foundations. The Consortium is proud to be part of that success. For more information on Healthy Start please visit the Web site of the California Department of Education (www.cde.ca.gov/ls/pf/hs).

The Consortium was the first ever pooled fund governed by the state's leading foundations. By 2005, Consortium membership had grown from eight foundations to 19, with 23 member foundations at its peak. The Consortium's mission was to bring philanthropy together with community, schools and government to improve public policy and practice. What held the Consortium's members together was a commitment to improving public policy and a set of values. Staff and board were acting on the basis of these values before they were even articulated. However, articulation of these values reinforced the Consortium's vision and enabled it to communicate that vision more effectively to government partners and foundation boards. In brief, these values were:

- Focus on the whole child within the context of the family and community. Children and families experience life's challenges as an interrelated whole, not as a series of categorical problems.
- Be inclusive. Policy decisions must involve those who are impacted, including service providers, youth, families and community residents.
- Be accountable for results. Funders must focus primarily on community results, and programs on participant outcomes.
- Fund smart. Learn what works or what shows promise. Gather and analyze data to learn what works and stop funding what doesn't.

Throughout its fourteen years the Consortium faced many barriers to effective policy for children and their families. The Consortium sought champions within government who wanted to build capacity for quality in local programs, create sensible financing structures and get input from those typically left out of legislative and administrative policy development.

The work was all done through foundation-government partnerships:

- The Consortium provided technical support to legislative staff working to develop AB1741, known as the Youth Pilot Project. The legislation authorized the Health and Human Services Agency to offer selected counties the flexibility to blend state dollars from selected programs to provide more comprehensive, preventive services to children and youth. In partnership with the Health and Human Services Agency, the Consortium designed, funded and directed a county policy academy with the goal of helping nine counties prepare for AB1741 selection. The academy was so successful the Consortium funded a second round involving an additional 11 counties. The academies augmented the capacity of county inter-disciplinary teams to collaboratively develop and implement more integrated child and family policy at the county level.
- The California After School Partnership built a decentralized system that redesigned the way the California Department of Education supported program quality at the local district level. After School “regional leads” in 11 regions throughout the state are responsible for supporting quality after school programs through fund development, local partnerships³, training and technical assistance. Designated “regional learning centers” — one or more per region — demonstrate exemplary after school programs and are peer-learning centers for other programs throughout the region. Regional leads and learning centers work together with individual sites to increase program effectiveness and sustainability. In addition, the Partnership laid the groundwork for a statewide after school network, an inclusive group of after school stakeholders that will advocate for appropriate policy and advise a legislatively mandated after school advisory committee that reports to the governor and the state superintendent.
- The California Child Welfare Partnership accomplished numerous objectives and spawned additional collaborations. It launched the State Interagency Team to integrate policy across departments and agencies and to break down barriers to effective policy implementation, including increasing financing flexibility. It established the Breakthrough Series Collaborative, a major effort involving over 40 counties, whose mission is to improve county and community collaboration to assist families reported to the child abuse hotline.⁴ It coordinated the first major strategic effort among state and county child welfare agencies to proactively communicate the positive results — grounded in data — of improved child welfare policy and practice. This included four major publications used as primary reference by private and public funders alike.⁵ And, the California Child Welfare Partnership established a mechanism, authorized by the legislature, to enable private funders to match public dollars for improving the outcomes of children and youth who are in foster care.
- The Public-Private Family Support Funders Group has taken a highly diverse, fragmented, under-funded, under-developed field — the family support field — and organized it into a new association: the California Family Resource Association. It has breathed new life into programs by designing and testing a high quality curriculum on sustaining quality family support programs.

The Consortium held four statewide conferences entitled Pilots to Policy to emphasize the need to replace pilot projects that come and go with state policy that ensures consistent results for children and families. It also urged three California Policymaker Institutes to focus on results accountability, particularly in the improvement of child welfare and health. The Consortium published thirteen policy briefs in total on how to strengthen policy and practice for improved results. \$30 million over 14 years: Quite an investment and worth every penny.



What Does Success Look Like for a Foundation-Government Partnership?

How do you know a successful foundation-government partnership when you see one? This has been a tremendously challenging question for both the members and the staff of the Foundation Consortium. There are so many possible measures of success. First, there are results for people, programs and systems. Are the beneficiaries of the partnership work any better off? Have agencies changed the way they conduct business? Are systems more comprehensive, integrated, preventive? Second, did the partnership achieve its objectives? Third, it is important to look at the process of the partnership itself. Is communication among partners frequent, direct and honest? Are partnership decisions transparent to each partner and to others with whom they work?

Then there is the issue of attribution versus contribution. Did the partnership make a critical difference or did it merely take credit for an accomplishment of some other entity or force? How can we know if partnership work contributed to an accomplishment? Can the level of contribution be measured?

The Foundation Consortium has spent considerable sums on and experimented with many different evaluation methods throughout its history. Here are some of the approaches that have been tried:

- A \$1.5 million evaluation of Healthy Start programs conducted by Stanford Research Associates (SRI) produced data that were used repeatedly in support of continued program funding.
- An outside evaluation of county capacity building for system change (County Policy Academy) conducted by Brizius and Foster confirmed the value of the academy process in helping county departments and agencies work together to plan more comprehensively for children and families.

- An assessment of county programmatic and administrative changes to make services more comprehensive, integrated and flexible for families. Through surveys and key informant interviews Philliber Research Associates defined these systems changes, but could not attribute the change to Consortium activities.
- A summary analysis of California local after school evaluations and state evaluation data prepared by U.C. Irvine documented improved outcomes for participating students as a result of the program and made the difference in building legislative support for continued funding.
- Applied Survey Research evaluated the Results for Children Initiative, a partnership between the Consortium and four county First 5 commissions.
- The outside evaluation of the Child Welfare Partnership by the National Health Foundation documented the importance of the partnership in maintaining focus on child welfare improvements during an administrative transition.
- The Consortium director's report on work plan performance measures informed the board of accomplishments and trouble spots needing course correction.

Despite their utility, these various efforts of measuring results still left most Consortium members (and staff) dissatisfied. Though each evaluation demonstrated positive results, none could demonstrate overwhelming success. Furthermore, the Consortium could not prove its contribution really made the difference. Separately or together, the evaluation results did not tell a powerful story that helped the collaborating foundations communicate to their constituencies "Wow! This partnership is really worth the effort."

Measurement as a Learning Tool

In spite of these challenges, the Consortium learned a lot from the evaluations it conducted:

- Legislatively mandated initiatives that do not specify desired results have a hard time demonstrating their success. For example, was Healthy Start about meeting children's health needs, meeting basic family needs, improving children's academic achievement or increasing family involvement in the schools?
- Outcomes of comprehensive initiatives (such as Healthy Start) are very challenging to measure.
- Statewide evaluations of local programs (such as Healthy Start) are expensive and challenging to design in a way that responds flexibly to local needs and circumstances while yielding comparable data across programs or counties.
- A partnership's ultimate outcome can be complex and quite distant in time. Interim accomplishments frequently are process measures and do not generate the kind of excitement sometimes needed to keep partners motivated. In addition, the relationship between partnership activities (interventions) and desired results may not be direct.
- Systems change is difficult to measure and very difficult to attribute to any single entity or group of interventions.
- California legislators hold state agencies accountable for results, but often do not allocate resources to support rigorous evaluation. As a result evaluation data from local programs can sometimes sit in cardboard boxes for extended periods of time because the agency is unable to analyze the data or use it for continued program improvement.
- One can better measure the success of capacity-building initiatives if baseline information is first gathered on what participants know and can do at the beginning of an initiative and is later compared to what participants know and have done at the end. Such an approach really informs future efforts.

- An outsider's evaluation of the foundation-government process is extremely helpful to the partnership — especially during a partner transition.

Should foundations give up on evaluating partnerships? Absolutely not. At a minimum, it is important to know if you accomplished what you set out to and if the "customers" of your effort were satisfied. For example, in the First 5 Partnership, the Consortium was successful in helping four county commissions build more inclusive planning and governance processes and in helping the commissions learn how to hold their grantees accountable for results. However, it was less successful in helping the commissions hold themselves accountable for results. The Consortium learned that it did not offer enough technical advice on implementation of results-based accountability. This finding led the Consortium to develop the *Guide to Results Oriented Community Change*.²

An internal performance measurement system for the partnership, accompanied by honest self-appraisal, can produce very valuable information. This requires the partnership to develop a work plan with performance measures for each specific activity it engages in. Partnership staff can design data collection processes for the performance measures and review progress quarterly. At the end of each year, performance against expectations is summarized and accomplishments are reported.

The remaining question is both relatively straightforward and tremendously important: What convinces the members of a foundation-government partnership that its results justify the costs? Consortium experience shows that in the absence of definitive data, a good story will do. More and more evaluators understand that data *and* stories are best for convincing funders — both public and private. The Consortium "story" is at the beginning of this brief.



THE STORY OF THE FLEA
AND THE ELEPHANT

Six Lessons for Foundations that Wish to Partner with Government

Lesson 1: Be humble. Know yourself and your partner.

It takes humility to be a good partner. Just accepting that you cannot dance alone takes some humility. Once the partnership gets underway, however, it is easy for both partners to lose perspective and to think: “I deserve to lead this dance. My partner should just follow my lead.”

This type of thinking creates serious challenges for foundation-government partnerships — especially if one partner does not know or understand the context of the other. Here are five points that foundation partners need to remember:

- The policymaking process is chaotic and uncontrollable. Protect your interests but be flexible — learn to live with bumps and sudden changes of direction (and administration).
- Understand how public policy issues arise, turn into policy proposals that ultimately pass (or fail) and become implemented and how this cycle relates to public attention. Take a look at the chart on page 13 and ask yourselves, “Where on this chart is the issue we want to partner on? Given where the issue is, what activities should we be helping our government partners to accomplish? What activities should we be anticipating?”
- Don’t expect government to be accountable in the same ways foundations are. The public sector has a much wider range of constituencies and needs than you do. In government, accountability rests with the voters and those who get the votes. As a foundation, don’t expect to drive partnership accountability. You didn’t get any votes.
- No matter how much you know, no matter how non-partisan you think you are, no matter if you wear the “good government” hat, among some people in government, you are still just another special interest.
- No matter how big your foundation endowment, your partnership contribution is just a rounding error in a big public budget. You are a flea on the elephant’s back.

Once upon a time there was a flea who lived on the right ear of a big, powerful elephant that worked in a forested region in India. The elephant spent all day doing many important jobs in the forest and for the people in the villages on the edge of the forest. He pulled up trees for building huts and for firewood. He helped to make roads and build houses.

Now, while elephants are smart, they need to be managed. This elephant had a mahout who sat upon his back and told the elephant where to go and what to do. The mahout got the elephant started in the morning, gave him instructions all day, and in the evening he led him to a forest river to bathe and cool off. Without the mahout to direct him, the elephant sometimes got confused or decided to go off on his own. This could be quite a disaster for the forest and the villagers. One time he ran amuck through the town ripping huts apart, wrecking the marketplace entirely and even accidentally crushing a few innocent bystanders.

The flea remained calm no matter what the elephant did except, of course, when the elephant splashed in the river and got him wet. He sat very high up on the elephant and from his vantage point he learned a lot about the forest and the villages. He could see what the villagers had and what they needed. But, while he knew a lot, he was a bit of a foolish flea. Somehow, he got the idea that he could actually influence the elephant to do what he thought was best for the villagers. He began hollering directions into the elephant’s ear. As long as the flea’s directions matched the mahout’s directions things went well.

The flea began to feel like he was telling the elephant what to do:

“Turn left here, Elephant.”

“Take this wood to that family who needs to build a house.”

“Don’t muddy the river right now, Elephant, the women need to wash their clothes.”

When the elephant did what he said the flea puffed out his chest and felt very proud. “I am a fine fellow,” he thought. “I have much more power than an ordinary flea.” He knew a lot and he had good intentions, but, as I said, he was a foolish flea.

One day, the elephant was involved in building school huts in the villages on the edge of the forest. The huts were places the children could go near the school when they needed help or to just to relax and have fun when their lessons were over. The elephant built huts in two villages and the flea could see that the children really liked the huts. The flea was excited and spent hours offering his wisdom and directions, which he mistakenly thought the elephant was really listening to. He was looking forward to school huts in every village, full of happy, playing children.

But one morning, as he was waking up and stretching all his many legs and yawning his proboscis, he noticed that his Elephant was not walking to the next village to build a school hut. Instead, the Elephant was helping other elephants build a new road in the forest far away from the village that needed the school hut. This was very upsetting to the flea. He knew the children in the remaining villages needed school huts. What was he going to do?

He thought to himself: “Maybe my friend the Elephant forgot what he is supposed to be doing.” He crawled close to the elephant’s ear opening and shouted as loud as he could: “GO BACK TO THE VILLAGE AND BUILD THE NEXT SCHOOL HUT.” But the elephant kept right on pulling logs onto the dirt road. So the flea jumped right into the elephant’s ear and bit him as hard as he could on the softest place he could find. “That will make him listen up,” he thought. “I know what is best for the children in the villages.”

Well, the elephant trumpeted loudly. He shook his big head from side to side. He flapped his right ear again and again. “What is wrong with you today?” asked the mahout in a soothing voice to the elephant. I must calm you down or soon you will run amuck.” So he leaned forward and lifted up the elephant’s ear and peered in. “Oh,” he said, “There is a flea on your ear right on this tender spot.” And he put his thumb and forefinger together picked off the flea and threw it on the ground.

The flea was indignant and for just a moment thought of fighting back. Then he saw the elephant’s very big feet about to crush him. “I’d better get to a safe place,” he thought and he ran under a log as quick as ever he could. “I guess I’m just a tiny flea compared to this big elephant,” he thought. But when the elephant (and the mahout) weren’t looking he jumped back on the elephant’s leg and began the long climb up. “Hum,” the flea thought as he climbed. “I guess I’ll have to think of a different way of getting the elephant’s attention.

Moral: Don’t think you have more power than you do. Strategic direction and persistence work better than bravado.



realistic

It also helps for foundations to share with their government partner some things about their culture. For example:

- Philanthropy works hard to be smart. Foundations invest heavily in knowledge development and are eager to share what they know.
- Philanthropy can be nimble and flexible in getting resources, executing contracts, responding to needs, changing directions.
- Philanthropy is devoted to doing “right.” Compromise is not a well-honed skill and in some foundations not even valued.
- Foundations have resources, particularly for things government cannot fund, like capacity building, research, evaluation and demonstration projects. Foundations will go a long way to leverage their resources with public dollars.
- Funders do not like to be told to “leave their money on the stump and walk away.” Many want to be involved in building a solution.

Government cannot make foundations do anything. It cannot starve them or mandate any specific action. Foundations are stubborn. They last. They will be around when a politician loses the next election or gets “termed out.”

Lesson 2: Be realistic about what you want and can accomplish.

Clear objectives are a must for any partnership. Written agreements are necessary but not sufficient. The memorandum of understanding between the Foundation Consortium and the Governor and State Superintendent had three clear objectives. The problem was nobody really knew what the third objective - “Create a statewide system of school-linked services” — meant. The lack of agreement on the meaning of this objective was the death knell of the Healthy Start foundation-government partnership.

You may be clear on your objective — for example, make county systems that serve children and families more comprehensive, integrated and preventive — but your expectations can be out of sync with your resources or your time line.

You cannot leverage a boulder with a toothpick. The Consortium once held a meeting with six counties to discuss systems change for children and families. Near the end of the meeting one county administrator raised his hand and said, “This is all very well and good, but what you have outlined will take about 20 years.” He was trying hard to be polite and not laugh at us. It turns out he underestimated the job. At the end of 14 years of existence, the Consortium still hasn’t accomplished all the “system changes” it envisioned.

Building comprehensive solutions is harder than anyone thought. It is easier to *think* than to *act* comprehensively and probably more important. Over time, Consortium objectives became more specific and realistic:

- A statewide system of comprehensive, integrated school-linked services *became* a statewide association of community-based, neighborhood family centers.
- Comprehensive school-based programs for children *and* families *became* after school programs that focus on mentoring, homework assistance and youth development.
- Countywide systems change for families and children *became* county-community partnerships to provide a more individualized, preventive response to families who have been reported to the child abuse hotline.

Here are two important lessons:

- Spend time on the front end of the partnership, defining very specifically what goals and objectives mean to each party. Your understanding of them will change over the life of the partnership and differences will arise. At least you will know that you did have common ground at one point. That can help you through the rough times as you refine your objectives.

- Match expectations to resources. See the big picture. Think comprehensively. But, focus, focus, focus. Do what you have the ability and resources to do and celebrate that. If you share a vision, others will pick up where you left off. A well-articulated vision also can draw other resources to support additional parts of the implementation.

Lesson 3: Communicate, communicate, communicate.

Over the Consortium's history, communications — telling stories well — became a key feature in partnerships with government. The first partnership, Healthy Start, had no communications component at all. The After School Partnership developed a name and logo and included several press events. The Child Welfare Partnership had a strategic communications plan with state, county welfare and consortium partners, press kits, fact sheets, and op-ed pieces. The Consortium invested heavily in communications expertise for the new California Family Resource Association.

One of the most important lessons the Consortium has learned in partnering with government is that foundation partners must be prepared to communicate their policy agenda in terms that make sense to both elected and appointed officials.

The truth is most elected officials are interested in what their constituents want — at least those who vote. Foundations do not vote. They cannot contribute to campaigns. Public officials must pay attention to what their bosses — the governor or state superintendent — want. Foundations must be able to tell a story about people, what they need and want, what will help them, and how a foundation-government partnership can make a difference.

Most foundations do not have communications expertise on staff. Furthermore, most foundation trustees are reluctant to make communications grants. Communications expertise in a foundation-government partnership is essential. It is not a luxury.

Lesson 4: When partners change, adjust.

Expect change in a partnership. In general, change happens more frequently in government than in the foundation environment. Throughout its government partnerships the Consortium experienced:

- Three governors.
- Three state superintendents.
- Four Secretaries of Health and Human Services.
- Numerous department directors, deputy directors and other administrative changes.

Yet partnerships depend upon personal relationships. Here are several lessons the Consortium has learned about changing partners in a foundation-government partnership:

Be aggressive about meeting with the new partner. No matter how busy the new appointee is, no matter how many pressing priorities they have, contact them right away and schedule a face-to-face meeting.

- Prior to a meeting prepare written communication that briefly describes the history of the partnership and its accomplishments to date.
- Be direct with your new partner about:
 - the goals of the partnership
 - what you need from them for the partnership to remain successful
 - what parts of the agreements with the previous partners must remain in place for the partnership to be viable for you
 - what parts you can be flexible about
- Be willing to let go. If after a few face-to-face meetings you still get signals that the new partner does not understand or put a priority on the partnership, request a face-to-face meeting to politely but formally end the partnership. You don't need to threaten. It is not personal. Just let go.



change

Lesson 5: Watch where you are going — it will change over time.

Foundation-government partnerships change. Even if the strategic goal of a partnership is well defined and agreed upon by all partners, shifts in direction are inevitable. The California After School Partnership wanted after school programs to achieve results such as improved academic achievement and more positive choices by participating youth. The Consortium knew that it took well-funded, quality programs to achieve those results, but our understanding of *how* to achieve quality changed. Over time it became clear that program staff learned quality by being coached and mentored, not just by being “trained.” It made a difference for program staff to visit an exemplary program site to see, touch and feel — not just hear about — “quality.” Furthermore, after school program leaders needed to define quality for themselves and not have indicators picked for them by funders. The partnership discovered that the road to quality was a lot more complicated than we thought.

As previously mentioned, partners change. The new partner wants to remain in the partnership but change the goal — perhaps focus on a particular aspect of the original goal. The Child Welfare Partnership with the Davis administration was focused on Child Welfare Redesign — broad changes in how child welfare services were delivered, including partnerships with community agencies to prevent child abuse and neglect from occurring. The Schwarzenegger administration narrowed its focus to three child welfare system reforms: child safety, differential response to families reported to the child abuse hotline and permanency and improved outcomes for children in the system and youth transitioning out of it. They wanted to remain in a partnership with the Foundation Consortium and continue the work on interagency coordination and communications, but prevention was not a priority for them. The partnership redefined its goals and continued.

Watch where you are going in a foundation-government partnership:

- Be strategic: never lose sight of your ultimate goal.

- Be tactical: understand your environment and how changes impact your ability to achieve your strategic goals.
- Remember, purpose is no substitute for process. You *have* to be able to negotiate obstacles in your path. This takes all the process skills that myriad publications about partnership cite over and over: leadership, open and honest communication, mutual respect, highly skilled meeting facilitation, governance that defines conflict management, inclusive planning and patience.

Lesson 6: Be persistent. But be willing to let go.

The longest foundation-government partnership the Consortium participated in was five years: The California After School Partnership. By the end, we were just hanging on to each other, all our energy and enthusiasm drained. We had no common direction because we had difficulty even communicating. Obviously, persistence was not enough. The Consortium made a decision, *with its partners*, to end the partnership. We left as we started — in good faith. Because of that the Consortium has been able to continue its after school work even though the California After School Partnership ended.

Here are four important signs that the partnership is in trouble:

- Your partner is saying one thing to you and doing another.
- Decisions are not being made in a timely manner or there is no follow-through.
- Meetings are tough to schedule and decision-makers do not attend.
- You realize that you and your partners no longer have shared goals.

If you make several efforts to address these issues with no improvement, it is time to end the partnership. Be up-front with your concerns. Take a measured pace. It took the Consortium and the California Department of Education almost nine months to end the partnership.

Ready... Set... Go!

Getting Started

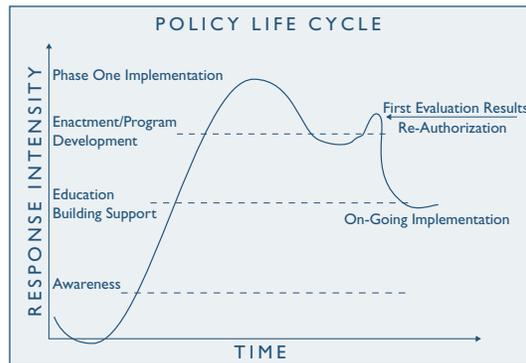
The Consortium hopes that many more foundation-government partnerships get started. Such partnerships achieve results, can leverage millions in public funds and make government more effective. On top of that they are exciting and rewarding.

Get Ready: Ask Yourself Four Questions

What is your purpose? If you want to influence policy and its implementation you need to understand the policy cycle.

Are you trying to build public awareness of a problem or a public policy solution to that problem? Are you educating others about general solutions or providing technical advice on a specific solution such as legislation or a county executive order? Perhaps you are interested in making sure that a specific policy solution actually achieves the results intended. Are you trying to re-awaken the public to the fact that a problem was not actually solved?

Ride the policy wave. In its Healthy Start and After School Partnerships the Foundation Consortium rode the rising crest of policy cycle. We offered technical advice to legislators, conducted general policy education and provided support for quality implementation of passed legislation for three and five years respectively. In child welfare, a California Policymaker Institute called attention to an emerging problem and helped move stakeholders to action. The Consortium created the Child Welfare Partnership during the developing phase of the policy cycle and continued through policy implementation. The Public-Private Family Support Funders group worked at the emerging end of the policy wave, building the capacity of neighborhood family centers to raise public awareness about problems facing families — particularly poor and immigrant families — and advocate for neighborhood family centers as a solution.



What is your intention? Intention is different than purpose; it is subtler. Be clear about your motivations. Do you want just to share information or powerfully influence a government course of action? Are you open to joint discovery of the right approach or do you know it all? Don't imagine you can manipulate government. Be transparent about your motivations.

What do you need to make the partnership work for you? As a foundation, you are accountable to your Board of Trustees. Foundation boards differ greatly. Before you build your partnership, be clear about what your board needs to know to feel successful in this partnership. Make sure you can get this in the partnership. If a potential public partner is not willing to help you get it, the partnership is doomed from the start.

What are you offering? How much money can you put on the table? Is it sufficient to be attractive to public partners? Is your money the only way they can accomplish an activity they are committed to? Perhaps your potential government partner wants technical expertise or information you can access or develop for them. Sometimes, potential government partners want to build internal support for a policy approach and they want to use your knowledge and expertise to convince key policymakers. It helps to know about the motivating factors of potential government partners, but be clear about what you yourself are offering.

intention

Get Set

Approach your potential partner. Relationships make or break a partnership. At the start of every Consortium partnership somebody in a foundation knew somebody in government. It can be a legislator, senior public official, county supervisor or agency head. If you do not have a relationship, start one. Ask for an appointment with a public official. Go to the appointment with someone who already has a relationship with that official. Invite a policymaker to meet with your board. Focus your interaction on discovering what goals you might have in common. Gather information on your potential partner's way of operating. If you are going to play a lead role in the partnership, what does your "gut" tell you about how you will get along with a potential partner? Pay attention to what your gut says. A solid relationship between individuals can carry a partnership through some unexpected rough spots in the dance.

Make "the ask." Here are three examples based on Consortium experience:

"We see that you are charged with implementing an after school program with very little administrative dollars and no funds for technical assistance. We would like to work with you to provide support for quality programming and support to build the policy voice of the new after school field. Are you interested?"

"The Consortium is really interested in community partnerships between county agencies and community organizations to improve outcomes for children and families. We noticed that community partnership is a key component of your proposed Child Welfare Redesign. Could we work together to support implementation of the Redesign in a way that would ensure community participation and partnerships?"

"We see that you spend a considerable amount of public dollars on family support programs around the state. Would you be interested in working with several private foundations that are also interested in family support programs? We would like to see if public and private funders have some common interests around strengthening the field of family support."

The final design of each partnership looked different than what we had imagined at the time we asked the question. In each case, however, the question set the stage for a very satisfying (and productive) dance.

Sign. A formal signed partnership agreement or joint work plan is a must — especially if the partnership is going to last for more than six months. The partnership may not stick with the formal agreement or work plan. The contents may change over time. However, a signed, joint agreement or work plan yields several benefits:

- The *process* of developing the agreement helps the partners to clarify their goals and objectives. It uncovers each partner's real intentions (if you listen carefully). It builds relationships because during the process disagreement is bound to occur. The emerging partnership can test its approach to dealing with conflict.
- The written agreement creates a common history. If the partnership drifts or if individual members change, the agreement recalls the original purpose.
- It forms the basis for communication with others about the partnership.
- The agreement or work plan reinforces accountability within the partnership. Commitments of dollars and other resources are on the record. Partnership policy and procedures are clear.

Common components to a partnership agreement or work plan include:

- The purpose, goals and objectives of the partnership.
- Joint activities and a timetable.
- The commitments each partner makes to each major activity: dollars, staffing, and technical expertise.
- Governance process, including conflict resolution.
- Major partnership policies such as communication with the public or media.

Now, you are ready. You are set. All you have left to do is expect unpredictability, be flexible, work hard, have fun and don't take it personally.

Sources of More Information:

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FOOTNOTES

¹*Choosing the Path Less Traveled: Strengthening California Families Through Differential Response*. By Patricia Shene, Ph.D. and Stuart Oppenheim. Edited by Cathy Senderling. July 2004

²*Community Partnerships: The Living Legacy of Healthy Start*. By Lisa Villarreal with Joanne Bookmyer. April 2004

³The Guide to Results Oriented Community Change will be available on the Consortium's Web site (www.foundationconsortium.org) from 1/3/2006-6/30/2006 and subsequently located on the Web site of the California Family Resource Association. (www.californiafamilyresource.org)

The Consortium wants California's children to be safe, healthy and learning each day.

Established in 1991, the Foundation Consortium for California's Children & Youth is a non-partisan resource bringing philanthropy together with community, schools and government to improve public policy and practice. The Consortium is a pooled fund of 21 of California's leading foundations. Foundation members are independent, yet they share common goals and the strategy of public-private partnerships.

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