

# COACHING FOR COMMUNITY AND ORGANIZATIONAL CHANGE

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Today, coaches work with more than athletes. Personal life coaches work with individuals; executive coaches work with leaders in the private and public sector; and community coaches work with local leaders and social change organizations. Working with a coach is a strategy to set goals, take action, make better decisions and develop natural strengths.

Coaching for community and organizational change is attracting increasing attention from the development and social change world. And it is producing promising results, at least in the short term. This is the conclusion of a group of experienced coaches and representatives from nonprofit groups and foundations who participated in a roundtable in October 2005, in order to pool what they know about coaching for community and organizational change.

The 28 roundtable participants brought first-hand knowledge of at least seven cross-community initiatives, all involving coaching, that reflected both a commitment to place and the belief that people who are empowered can make a difference in their communities. Here, we synthesize the roundtable discussion for communities and organizations considering whether or not to work with a coach, and for funders who want to better understand coaching outcomes.

Because the evaluation challenges are significant and many coaching initiatives are still relatively young, we don't yet understand the long-term outcomes. We hope this report will inspire efforts to better measure the effectiveness of coaching for community and organizational change.

## **What is coaching for community and organizational change?**

A community coach is a guide who supports communities and organizations in identifying and achieving their goals.

### **Coaches work over the long term, building capacity to:**

- \* Improve communication.
- \* Resolve conflicts.
- \* Strengthen relationships.
- \* Identify and connect to resources, both internally and externally.
- \* Provide opportunities for individual and collective learning.
- \* Respond to change.

### **Community coaching can be used to:**

- \* Create sustainable change.
- \* Develop partnerships.
- \* Build prosperity.
- \* Create a hopeful future.

## A FRAMEWORK FOR EXAMINING THE PRACTICE OF COMMUNITY COACHING

At the roundtable, we focused on coaching that supports intentional positive and sustainable change in communities regardless of the organization, institution or coalition that is leading the change agenda. Based on that discussion, we offer a simple concept as a framework for this kind of coaching: "The 4Rs of Community Coaching for Change." Coaching for community change really fits into three categories: relationships, results and reflection. However, we realized that coaching also involves helping people reach for new ideas and possibilities. So our operating framework for the practice of community coaching is the dynamic interplay of four domains or disciplines that a coach fuses to the community work in collaboration with the groups she is coaching.

There are seasons and cycles around some or all of these domains when a coach is working with a group. Coaches and community participants have natural affinities for one or more of the "Rs," thus individuals bring both a predisposition and a mindset to the work of change. On any given team you will have some people who frame the work of change through a lens of relationships, and others who are results oriented. This is what makes the practice of coaching an art rather than a technique, as the coach helps generate clarity, alignment and a sense of shared purpose or commitment within the change process.

### Coaching to Strengthen Teams and Relationships

Helping communities create and support new and lasting relationships is often at the core of coaching. A significant focus of community change coaching revolves around expanding who sits at the table and building new relationships with disenfranchised populations. Coaches help create places for safe dialog about divisive issues and develop consensus and commitment. They also assist teams in accessing opportunities to use, develop and respect the gifts and talents that are present in the community. Successful coaches build the capacity to trust, share leadership and partner.

### Coaching to Trigger Results

Coaches ask thoughtful questions that help groups identify the barriers or thinking ruts that keep them from making progress and capitalizing on opportunities. Coaches bridge the gap between the funders and the communities in ways that reinforce the communities' ability to make progress toward its goals. Coaches clarify goals, help identify critical action steps and milestones, access resource possibilities, and monitor the pace of the community's change efforts.

### Coaching to Frame Reflection

Coaching for reflection plays a critical role in the ability of groups to move from 'being stuck in the rut' to seeing the possibilities on the horizon. Among the important inputs coaches can add to successful reflection include the ability to create an environment where people are comfortable with a variety of vocabularies. Coaches help level the playing field so all can participate in reflective activities. Coaches can create openings for understanding progress, developing the consensus for change, appreciating the expected and the unexpected, using evidence, weaving stories, and initiating new ways for group and individual learning.

### Coaching to Expand Reach and New Possibilities

Coaches provide a clear focus on where a group wants to go and to reach out into the community to engage more diverse and unheard voices. Coaches can help reveal the hidden dimensions of social problems and engage people in a search for what is not known. Coaches encourage groups to create capacity, sustain the passion and action while creating higher levels of individual self awareness that lead to transforming the mindset of the entire team.



## SUCCESSFUL COACHES UNDERSTAND THAT ONE SIZE DOES NOT FIT ALL

Successful coaching is not formulaic; successful coaches understand intuitively and concretely that there is no one size that fits all. Each community is unique, and each community must discover and nurture that uniqueness as they build capacity and get things done. Successful coaches also focus on outcomes, but not at the expense of process. They are attuned to the need for balance. These coaches approach their task with an eye to the hoped for ripple effect of their work in capacity building; they strive for the time when the synergy of coaching and capacity building becomes part of the community's way of learning together. They hope to see individual capacity gains reflected in those of the team and subsequently in the community. The successful coach models this synergy by looking forward to new learning from every new encounter with the community and the team. Thus, coaches ready to succeed focus on expanding their own understanding and reservoir of resources as they work with others to increase the capacity of participants and the overall community.

Roundtable participants identified six competencies that all coaches should have:

- \* Improve communication.
- \* Resolve conflicts.
- \* Strengthen relationships.
- \* Identify and connect to resources, both internally and externally.
- \* Provide opportunities for individual and collective learning.
- \* Respond to change.

Improving communication, resolving conflicts and strengthening relationships speak to coaching for relationships. Identifying and connecting to resources relates to coaching for results. Providing opportunities for individual and collective learning relates to coaching for reflection. Responding to change leads to coaching for reach. Coaches use all of these competencies in addressing common challenges like encouraging inclusion and respecting diversity, and helping communities stuck in pause to hit the play button again.

Coaching is both an art and a craft. Coaches succeed in communities because of their respect for the implicit wisdom emerging from local people and their belief in human and community agency. Successful coaching also requires that all four elements of the equation (funders, intermediaries, coaches and community team members) be in harmony on the goals and the processes involved in the project. One Roundtable participant commented on the need to triangulate between the personality and skills of the coach; the personality, skills and assets of the community leaders; and the agenda of the funders.

### How Coaching Adds Value to Community Building Strategies

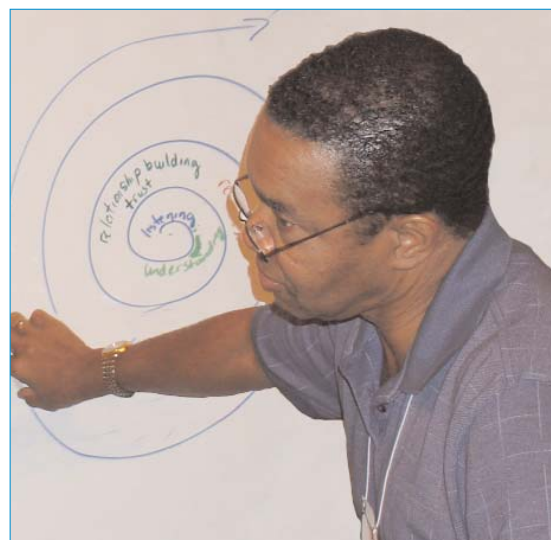
Coaching is a valuable nutrient and catalytic agent to any group efforts that require innovative ideas, shared leadership or participation, and comprehensive or integrative approaches across boundaries and economic sectors. Effective coaching, alone among other strategic approaches, provides the gestalt and enabling environment for collaboration, problem-solving, and shared learning for the common good or creating positive futures.

Coaching is an extremely effective tool for helping groups reframe their operating systems, unleash new ideas, transition to new leadership, and negotiate partnerships. Most of these are critical competencies for successful community building.

“The coaches provided encouragement when teams were struggling or unclear about how to proceed. They did not operate as consultants to the teams but provided recommendations for action, asked ‘tough’ questions, reminded teams of the ‘big picture,’ identified resources, listened actively, and linked the teams and WKKF. The coaches were challenged to maintain a flexible approach to working with their teams in order to respond to the team’s needs as they evolved.”

“W. K. Kellogg Foundation,  
Mid South Delta Initiative,  
Case Study on Coaching”  
*Academy for Educational Development*

*Samuel Cargile, Senior Program Director  
Lumina Foundation for Education*



## EVALUATING THE IMPACT OF COACHING

Roundtable participants believe that coaching offers unique benefits to funders, intermediaries, communities, and coaches themselves in that successful coaching provides opportunities for all to expand their learning. However, they also had concerns that although several foundations have evaluated projects that include coaching, we haven't really identified the metrics to help us evaluate the impact of coaching itself. When asked how they knew they made a difference in the community, participants responded with:

- \* Communities used new ways to live and work together.
- \* Community teams uncovered new ideas that led to successful community change.
- \* People came to see the reality of different perspectives, so they could work with others more effectively, reduce conflict, and create the conditions for a learning community.
- \* Leaders included the whole community rather than a select few or the traditional elite.
- \* Groups successfully challenged the status quo.
- \* Community groups were able to generate self-direction - to decide for themselves what will work, how and why.
- \* The group found a way to get unstuck and connect or reconnect their strategic work to their vision.

W. K. Kellogg Foundation evaluators concluded in their 2004 report that, "the most effective tool, as evidenced in all data collection done by the MSDI evaluation team, has been coaching at the community team level" (Academy for Educational Development, Washington, D.C.).

We see all these things as consistent with the community coach definition, yet they are not easy to measure. For instance, while we might count ages, colors, religions, etc. to measure inclusion, those measurements say little about inclusiveness - bringing forth all the voices, listening respectfully to those voices, and involving them directly in the meeting process.

Roundtable participants identified several challenges as we continue to grapple with the measurement conundrum. Participants asked, "How do we tie [measurement] to the definition? The coaching definition makes promises, the evaluation measures outcomes. They need to mesh." Many of these aspects of successful coaching are characteristics of a process and thus do not easily lend themselves to measurement. If we were to design a study to measure some of these elements, the cost could be very high. Furthermore, the impact of some successful coaching interventions may not surface until years later

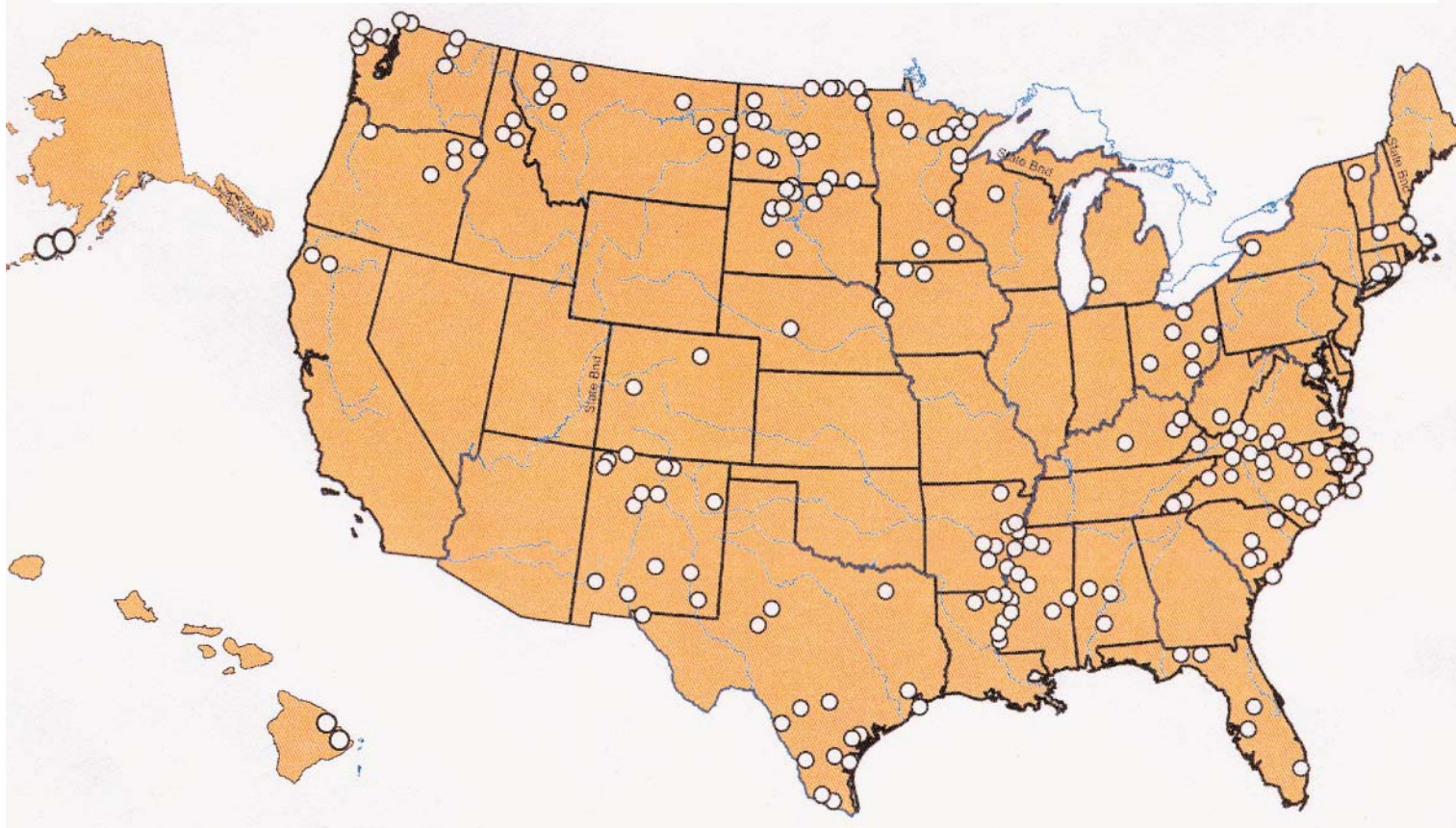


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### Building the Resources to Support the Field

In addition to better understanding how coaching contributes to long-term impact, participants offered four ideas of how we might pool our knowledge to build and support the field of coaching for community and organizational change. First, it is critical to develop the metrics to better understand when and how coaching is effective. Second, field-tested analyses of competencies would help us develop clearer job descriptions for coaches as well as effective training curricula for prospective coaches. Third, a strong community of practice among coaches, building from the one created by the Mid-South Delta Initiative, would increase skills, expand the coaching tool box, and transform thinking about community change. Finally, a field guide to community coaching would complement training curricula and lead to shorter cycles in the change process and more effective use of resources.

# A MAP OF COMMUNITY CHANGE EFFORTS SUPPORTED BY COACHING



## EARLY EXAMPLES OF COACHING TO STIMULATE COMMUNITY CHANGE: AN HISTORIC PERSPECTIVE

In our brief research into the field of coaching applications in a community context, we observed that the practice dates to the mid-1980s when MDC, a nonprofit research and development organization in North Carolina, began providing community-based technical assistance as a support intervention to increase the pace and success rates of local committees that were reshaping educational reform across the South.

Impressed by the early benefits, MDC began incorporating coaching into other change initiatives: reshaping the workforce development system in the mid South and expanding the capacity of rural community colleges to guide economic and education reform in highly distressed places. Several major foundations supported these efforts that used coaches: Ford, and W. K. Kellogg foundations, Lilly Endowment, Foundation for the Mid South and the Pew Charitable Trusts, among others. During the 1990s, many rural development and Extension faculty were also bringing a coaching approach to this work. As more community colleges in the South, Midwest and Southwest joined the Rural Community College Initiative, the Southern and North Central Regional Rural Development Centers brought Extension specialists into the practice of community coaching.

Since 2000, other foundations have used coaching to expand leadership, education reform and sustainable community development initiatives: Northwest Area Foundation, Lumina Foundation for Education, and The Duke Endowment. Both the Ford and W. K. Kellogg foundations also continued to support rural development models that drew upon coaching to guide the local change efforts.

Initial research for the recent roundtable generated a list of more than 220 American communities where coaching had been used as a strategic support for organizational development or broad-based community development. These communities were involved in various initiatives: Horizons, Montana Ventures, Reservation Ventures, Rural Community Colleges, Tribal and Native Serving Colleges as Catalysts for Rural Development, Mid South Delta Initiative, Kellogg Leadership for Community Change, Achieving the Dream--Community Colleges Count, Program for the Rural Carolinas, Community Based Forestry Programs, and ongoing community development coaching through LSU Extension and MDC (to universities in Namibia and South Africa).

## WHAT THE JOB ANNOUNCEMENT FOR A COMMUNITY COACH LOOKS LIKE

Coaches identified skills that might be related to basic preparation as well as those connected to each of the 4 Rs.

**Laying the Groundwork for Success** includes skills in working with multiple stakeholders; understanding of successful rural, community, and/or organizational change processes and strategies; co-learning; communications; facilitation; reflection; and using strength-based/appreciative inquiry processes.

**Coaching for Results** involves negotiation, reflective questioning, meeting management, conflict management, program development, and ability to do situational analysis and "work around detours."

**Coaching for Relationships** includes skills in expanding social capital, building collaboration, networking, and evaluation. Successful coaches also have tools to foster inclusion and boundary spanning.

"It is not sufficient to simply create a space; we need to help them know their voice is valuable by affirming/ validating their point(s) of view."

**Coaching for Reflection** may involve story telling, giving and receiving feedback, deep listening, and facilitating reflective processes.

**Coaching for Reach** invokes both the *art* of coaching as coaches find, develop, and use "coachable moments" and the *craft* of coaching as coaches use those moments to help people expand their view of the possible and their understanding of the present.

*"Coaches create a space for all to show up and be, with their own heart, mind and spirit."*

## WHAT COACHING LOOKS LIKE IN THE FIELD

Successful coaching for community change often involves four sets of players: funders, intermediaries, coaches and communities. Successful initiatives require each player to listen, give and receive feedback, and be open to a change process that will result in new learning for all.

### New Opportunities for Funders

Coaching adds value to other interventions. Coaching augments investments in training, such as leadership development, because it assists communities in successfully adapting best practices to their unique place. Coaching also provides a way for funders to invest in change strategies that are grounded in the locality, owned by the local people, and sustainable over time.

### New Opportunities for Nonprofits and Other Intermediaries

The addition of coaching to the array of programs and tools offered by a nonprofit not only expands their repertoire of services, but also increases the success of other technical assistance and training strategies.

### New Opportunities for Extension

Coaching may be a variation of Extension expertise that aligns with other kinds of expertise—a kind of educational delivery system which might be called "facilitated learning." Extension coaches at the roundtable described their work as building relationships, empowering people to control their own destiny, and building community and organizational capacity to bring about social change. For these coaches, connecting leaders and teams to external resources, particularly those connected to the land grant system, played a important role in their work.

### New Strategies in Coaching for Community and Organizational Change: Co-coaching

The notion of co-coaching has opened up an exciting area of exploration. We had several success stories on this technique. For example, when one coach is from inside the community and one from without, co-coaching can address the Insider vs. Outsider issue. Co-coaching approaches that model using differences to build strengths. It also helps group members and the community see their own differences as strengths, not barriers.

#### CONTRIBUTORS

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This monograph emerged from a distillation of the wisdom, insights, and experience shared at the Coaching Roundtable in Boise, Idaho October, 2005. Participants include: Alan Barefield, Samuel Cargile, Doug Clement, Ken Cohen, John Cooper, Harry Goldman, Kenneth Gonzalez, Jody Horntvedt, Ben Lindekugel, Byron McClennney, Freeman McKindra, Cynthia Pilcher, Barbara Radke, Ursula Roosen-Runge, Karma Ruder, Sam Scott, Frank Taylor, Kay Lynn Tettleton, Dianne Williams, Joyce Williams, and Barbara Wyckoff-Baird.