



City Connect Detroit

Building new links to community solutions

Emergent Collaborations, Networks, and National Resource Development: An Evolving Vision for City Connect Detroit

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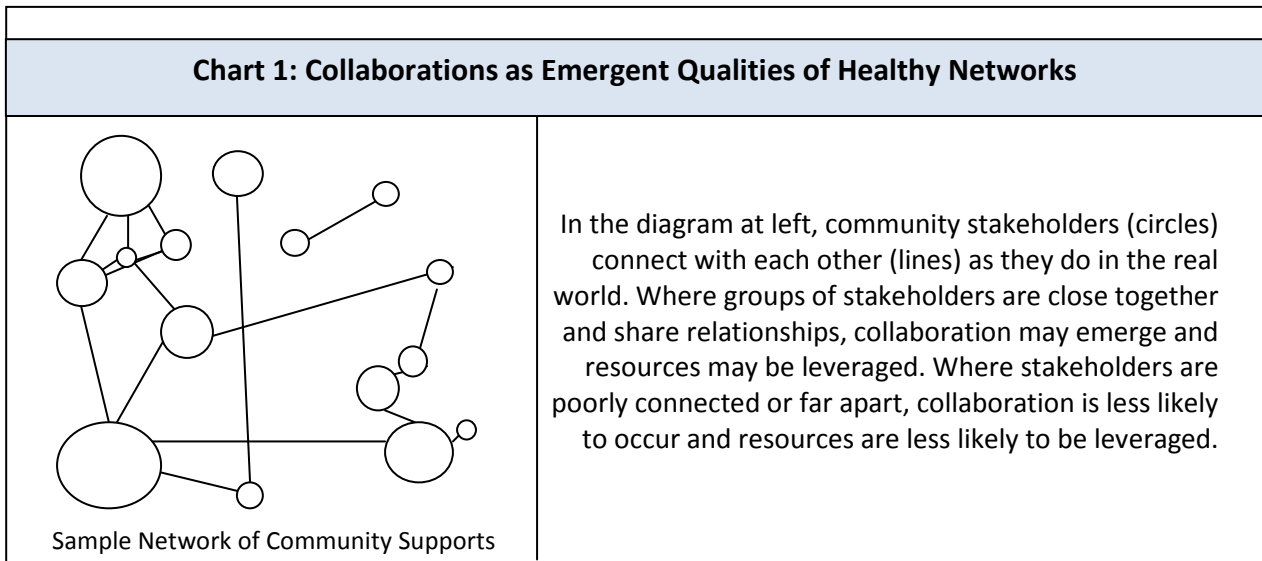
City Connect Detroit is redefining itself as it enters its second decade of service to the community. The agency's transformation responds to recent changes in agency and community leadership, completion of past plans and key funding agreements, and changes in community need. This transformation also responds to lessons learned throughout a decade of community service and from practitioners and researchers engaged in similar work within other communities. Most notably, City Connect Detroit's transformation involves transitioning from supporting a few key collaborations to strengthening the broader network of people, practices, policies, and resources that drive individual, family, and community growth and development across metro Detroit.

Drivers of Agency Transformation

A myriad of localized events and broader socio-economic changes are driving transformation of City Connect Detroit. Foremost among these drivers is the retirement of founding President and CEO, Geneva J. Williams, in March 2011, and the subsequent appointment of Dierk Hall as Interim President and CEO. Agency reform under a new leader is common, but City Connect Detroit is pressed to define its future more wholly and rapidly because of other changes within the agency's operating environment. City Connect Detroit's strategic plan and agreements with key funding partners will be complete in 2012, necessitating a review of operations and a new statement of future plans.

These changes come amidst a period of rapid socio-economic change, which has impacted both the agency and the communities it serves. Federal stimulus funding, developed to infuse resources into an ailing domestic economy, caused City Connect Detroit to rapidly scale-up supports for youth employment programs in the city during 2009. This work, now scaling-down, shed new light on the value that City Connect Detroit can bring to the community, but it also raised questions about community perception of the agency and its myriad roles. Community changes have included growing collaboration among local service agencies, extensive leadership changes at public and nonprofit organizations, growing challenges with vacant and blighted buildings, extensive school reform efforts, and a resurgence of violent crime in some neighborhoods, among others. How City Connect Detroit responds to these new dynamics will affect its support from the community for years to come.

Lessons learned from its decade of service are also driving transformation of the agency. Most notably, the agency has expanded its understanding of collaboration through practice and research. Agency personnel now believe that many community stakeholders use the term collaboration generically to describe diverse points on a continuum or cycle of working together. They also believe that what many call collaboration falls short of the spirit of that word and consequently fails to deliver results associated with it. Conversely, City Connect Detroit staff have come to appreciate the value added to this community through the broader spectrum of working together. Collaboration, as it turns out, is an emergent quality of a robust and healthy community network, comprised of people, practices, policies, and resources that promote positive change (Chart 1). As such, what often appear as redundant efforts are actually network nodes that help drive community change. Bringing nodes together for greater capacity is often helpful, but the breadth and scope of the broader community network is equally important to addressing community issues.



New Strategies for a New Day

Changes in the organization and the community and in the organization’s understanding of collaboration are cause for a revised organizational strategy on the part of City Connect Detroit. This strategy is being developed now and will continue to be crafted and refined throughout the fall of 2011. It is hoped that by January 2012, the organization will be prepared to make a community announcement about its future directions. Already, some facets of the strategy are starting to emerge.

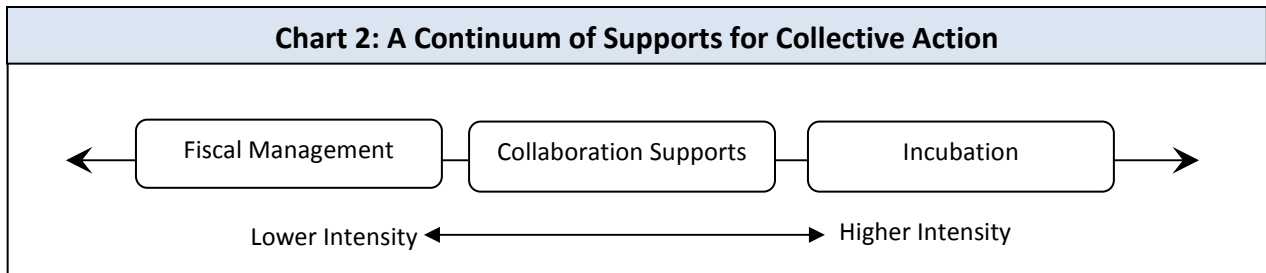
From Collaborations to Networks

City Connect Detroit will expand its efforts to promote working together from its focus on a small collection of community-wide collaborations to a focus on developing robust and healthy networks of people, practices, policies, and resources. These networks will be defined by traditional agency service areas: children, youth, and families; community health; and

community development. The agency will continue to facilitate and support community collaborations, but will expand its efforts to link multiple collaborations together in a network and to infuse new resources into each network. Resources that the agency hopes to infuse will transition from financial resources alone to financial, knowledge, data, and human resources that can expand and enhance the quality and impact of networks in each service area. It is expected that by expanding the agency’s focus to broader networks of community programming and support, the community’s resiliency and effectiveness will be increased.

Catalyzing Collective Action

With a new emphasis on building healthy community networks in each service area, the agency will continue to promote collaboration and collective action. City Connect Detroit will work to enhance its reputation as a neutral community capacity for building cross-sector linkages and the mutual trust, respect, and understanding needed to make them work. New emphasis will be applied to this work in several areas. Support for collective action will be delineated along a continuum of intensity, ranging from fiscal management to collaboration support services to incubation of community projects (Chart 2). Emphasis on moving from planning to action will also be stressed, as the organization has observed many community collaborations failing to transition from planning to implementation in recent years. City Connect Detroit will further identify opportunities for bringing stakeholders together around urgent and tough community issues, while providing them with a safe and welcoming environment in which to dream about tomorrow.



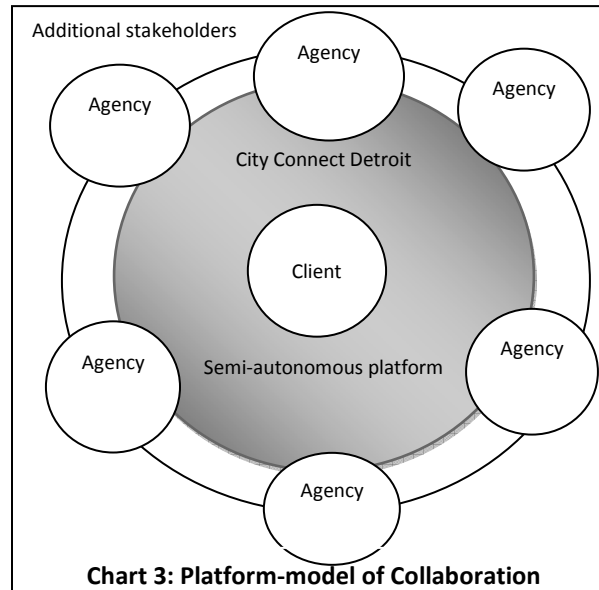
Infusing Evidence-based Practices

City Connect Detroit will leverage its access to national funding partners and local practitioners to help infuse demonstrated service models into community support networks. The agency is well-positioned to support the translation of emerging models into local practice, because it frequently interacts with funders who describe such models and it also meets often with local service providers who are looking for more effective service strategies. Conversely, the agency can bring locally effective models to the attention of national organizations. An important facet of this work involves collaboration with leading research universities. City Connect Detroit already helps to translate services between the University of Michigan and Detroit community organizations; opportunities for linking with other research institutions, from Wayne State to Michigan State to Stanford and beyond, are also ripe and will improve the overall quality of

programs and services in the networks of community support that City Connect Detroit is helping to build.

New Platforms for Collaboration

The agency will look to further refine and test a new “platform-style” technology for collaboration, which it has developed during the past decade (Chart 3). This approach involves resolving common barriers to collaborative service delivery, such as language and policy barriers, through a semi-autonomous infrastructure, to which City Connect Detroit provides oversight. This model has been developed from agency experiences with Data Driven Detroit, the Detroit Community Partnership to Eliminate Homelessness, Grow Detroit’s Young Talent, and, more recently, the High Risk Youth Workforce Development Collaborative. Its promise is that it can reduce or eliminate impediments to working together, particularly across systems, and ease demands placed on participants and service providers in a “service referral-style” of collaboration.



Increasing Access to Resources

City Connect Detroit will continue its rich legacy of connecting community organizations to funding resources. However, it will leverage its connections and access to partners to bring additional resources to the networks it serves. Resources may include funding, knowledge, people, partnering organizations, best practices, and others. The agency is especially interested in seeking out new partners from beyond metro Detroit, but it will continue to link local practitioners with local supports, as appropriate. City Connect Detroit will also work to develop its support for corporations, foundations, and individuals who wish to make an immediate impact on the region through a strategic philanthropic investment. The agency will support these funders by helping them to identify areas of key networks where they can make the most impact and by administering investments on their behalf.

Fiscal Sponsorship

To facilitate community capacity and access to resources, City Connect Detroit will extend the fiscal management services it has provided collaborations to grant makers and grant seekers in each of its three focus areas (children, youth, and families; community health; and community development). Services will be expanded from fiscal management to full fiscal sponsorship, which also includes human resource management, payroll management, service partnerships, grants management, risk management, project relations, and advisory board consultation services. Providing this expanded array of supports will promote the development of projects of

local interest, including both service and philanthropic initiatives. It will also strengthen City Connect Detroit's sustainability by expanding the agency's customer base and earned income.

Organizational Capacity

The organization has scaled-down to a core group of committed staff by the end of 2011. This group will finalize future directions and secure resources needed to begin agency growth anew. Moving forward, City Connect Detroit will adopt a flexible staffing model, not unlike that of its past, which involves a small group of core staff and an extensive network of consultants, interns, and other supports. The staffing plan will be designed to allow for rapid scaling of programs and services, as funding and demand allows.