

# RESILIENCE, RESOLVE, RESULTS

A Compilation of Readiness Phase Studies of  
The Skillman Foundation's  
Good Neighborhoods and Good Schools Initiative

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2008-2010



November 2011

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

The Center for Youth and Communities at The Heller School for Social Policy and Management at Brandeis University worked with the Skillman foundation and its implementation partners to build evaluation and learning capacity and assess GN/GS efforts between July 2007 and June 2011. For this report the Center conducted evaluations or assessments of the neighborhood systems of supports and opportunities, neighborhood capacities, and systems and policies. The Brandeis team included J.F. M. Consulting of Detroit, who played a major role over the last three years in evaluating the progress of neighborhood-focused strategies.

In 2010-2011, the Foundation added evaluators to study other specific aspects of the work:

- Touchstone Center for Collaborative Inquiry (Community Connections Small Grants Program);
- Institute for Research and Reform in Education (Good Schools history, context and theory of change);
- Wayne State University School of Social Work (organizational capacity building);
- Signet Consulting (the Foundation as a learning organization); and
- George Galster (quantitative indicators of neighborhood context).

This report is a compilation of the executive summaries of the reports above (except Galster's, which is available on the Foundation's website, [www.skillman.org](http://www.skillman.org)) and an overview of the GN/GS initiative to provide context. Efforts were made to ensure basic consistency in the formatting but variations occur because of differing authors' styles.

On behalf of all of the authors, we extend special thanks to The Skillman Foundation, National Community Development Institute, University of Michigan School of Social Work Technical Assistance Center, Prevention Network, and the six neighborhood Executive Directors for dedicating significant time and thought to working with us to develop the evaluation framework, consult on evaluation tools, provide guidance, collect data, be interviewed, review and discuss reports, and use evaluation results to improve the work. Additionally, we are deeply grateful to the approximately 400 individuals in neighborhoods, nonprofit organizations, government, other foundations, and business who participated in interviews, surveys, and/or focus groups. Finally, key to the oversight and planning of evaluation and learning activities over the course of the Readiness Phase were Marie Colombo, Sr. Program Officer for Knowledge Management at the Foundation, and Prue Brown, independent advisor.

Full reports may be found on The Skillman Foundation website at [www.skillman.org](http://www.skillman.org).

—*Susan P. Curnan and Della M. Hughes*, Co-Principal Investigators  
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# I. RESILIENCE, RESOLVE, RESULTS

## Overview of the Readiness Phase of The Skillman Foundation's Good Neighborhoods and Good Schools Initiative

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*Center for Youth and Communities  
Heller School for Social Policy and Management, Brandeis University*

### A. INTRODUCTION

*Deep in my heart I know that Detroit can change. Deep in my heart I know that this plan's ambitious goals are achievable... The mandate of the Board of Trustees of the Skillman Foundation to me and to the staff of the Foundation has been consistent: Results matter—think broadly and figure out a way to change the equation for Detroit's children... We want to be a change agent not a banker. More than anything, we want to be judged by our results.*

—Letter from the President, *Mapping the Road to Good*,  
2007 Sustainability Plan

After years of grant making that had produced benefits for individual children, but no lasting change in their conditions, The Skillman Foundation in 2006 formally launched a 10-year, \$100 million commitment to the Good Neighborhoods (GN) Initiative. GN aims to ensure that young people living in six Detroit neighborhoods<sup>1</sup> are safe, healthy, well-educated, and prepared for adulthood. While the GN Initiative was being rolled out, the Foundation honed its work with schools and in 2007 created the Good Schools Program. Skillman's overall work, brought together in 2008, became known as the "Good Neighborhoods and Good Schools" (GN/GS) Initiative.

The Foundation's new approach, joining the new generation of "place-based"<sup>2</sup> community change initiatives (CCIs), involves a range of neighborhood, school- and system-change strategies, in concert with various public and private partners, residents, and other stakeholders to improve outcomes for youth. Believing that resident engagement and leadership is critical to sustained, large-scale change for

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<sup>1</sup> The six neighborhoods – Brightmoor, Chadsey Condon, Cody Rouge, Northend Central Woodward, Osborn, and Southwest – were selected because of their high concentration of children and youth, their low income status, and the presence of assets that can be maximized to enhance the well being of children. A map of the neighborhoods appears in Section C.

<sup>2</sup> "Place based" refers to a targeted geographic area in which a change effort is focused.

children, GN/GS is anchored in a community partnership process. GN/GS also exemplifies two core attributes of CCI:<sup>3</sup>

- **Community building** among residents and stakeholders in the six neighborhoods is a central aspect of the work.
- The Foundation is using a “**comprehensive lens**” to address systemic issues that are important to support families and stabilize neighborhoods. These issues - such as access to youth and adult employment, food resources, health clinics, and tax assistance; home foreclosure prevention; and transportation – are not the primary focus of GN/GS but are viewed as influencing GN/GS success in achieving the long-term goals for children and youth.

The GN/GS architect and lead implementer, The Skillman Foundation, is an “embedded” funder<sup>4</sup> with strong local ties within the six target neighborhoods, rich networks citywide, and a commitment to providing resources and drawing upon strategies that go beyond conventional grantmaking.

This background section of the report provides a description of GN/GS efforts to date, including a brief description of the Detroit context, a summary of The Skillman Foundation’s transition to being a place-based funder and change agent, and an overview of the evaluation approach - and serves as an introduction to a portfolio of evaluation reports on the GN “readiness phase” and the early stages of the GS initiative. GN was designed with three phases: Planning (2006-2007), Readiness (2008-2010), and Implementation (2011-2016); GS does not have designated “phases.”

## **B. DETROIT CONTEXT: CHALLENGES AND ASSETS**

It is no secret that Detroit’s economic, political, social, and environmental conditions are grim. Once the nation’s fourth largest city, Detroit is now only 18<sup>th</sup> largest: the population has slipped from almost 2 million in 1950 to 713,777 in 2010.<sup>5</sup> This population loss, due largely to corporate failures and domestic automakers’ financial decline, is second only to New Orleans in Hurricane Katrina’s aftermath. In 2010, the Detroit Data Collaborative found that Michigan has the nation’s fourth highest foreclosure rate<sup>6</sup> and 26% of the city’s residential land parcels – once predominantly single-family homes – are vacant.<sup>7</sup> The large scale of the city compounds these challenges (see Exhibit 1).

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<sup>3</sup> Kubisch, A., Auspos, P., Brown, P., and Dewar, T. (2010). *Voices from the Field III: Lessons and Challenges from Two Decades of Community Change Efforts*. Washington, DC: Aspen Institute.

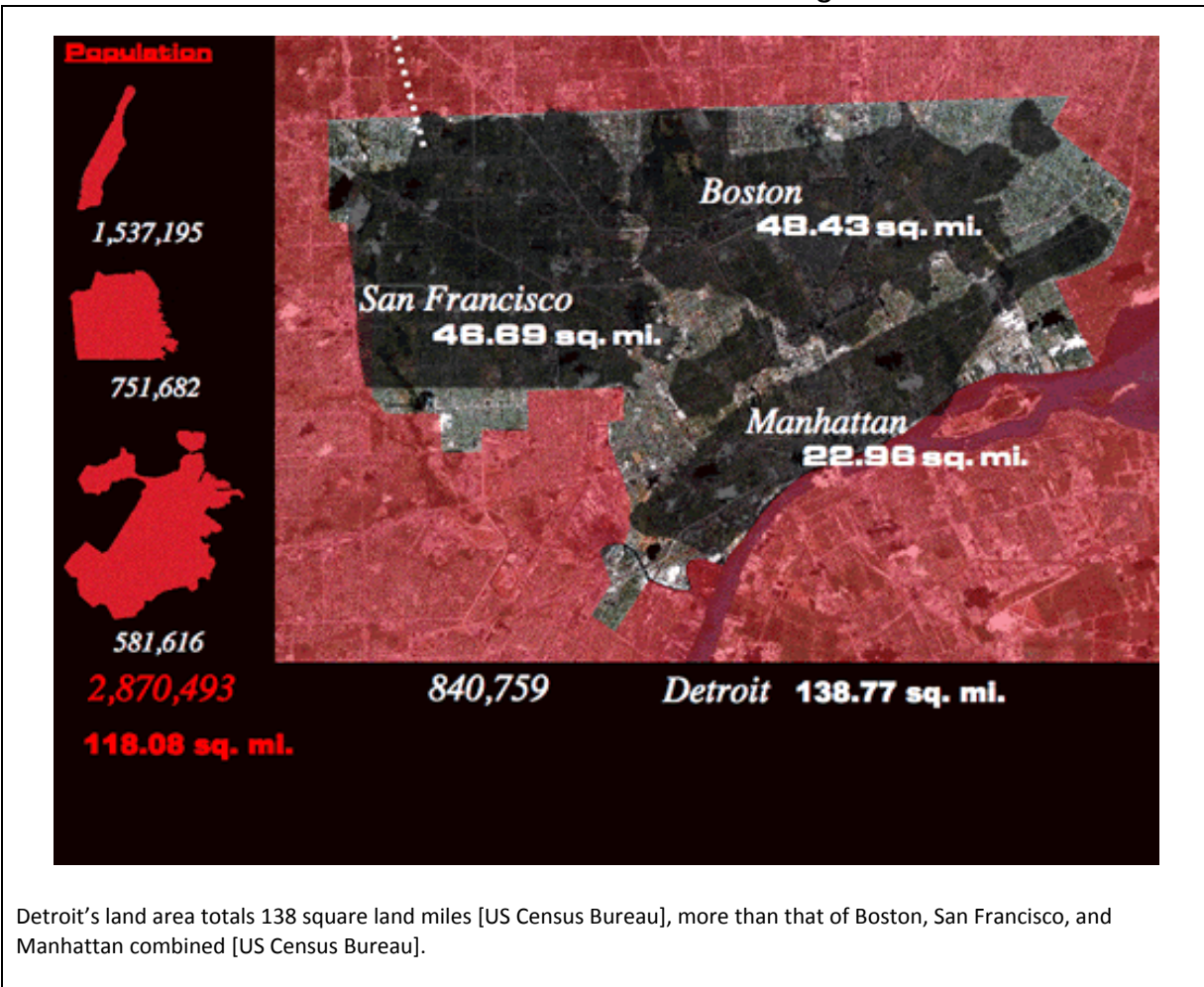
<sup>4</sup> Karlström, M., Brown, P., Chaskin, R. & Richman, H. (2009). Embedded philanthropy and the pursuit of civic engagement. *The Foundation Review*, 1(2), 51-64.

<sup>5</sup> Source: U.S. Census Bureau, Census 1990 and 2010.

<sup>6</sup> [detroit.cbslocal.com](http://detroit.cbslocal.com). March 10, 2011. <http://detroit.cbslocal.com/2011/03/10/mi-foreclosures-decline-still-ranked-4th-highest/#>

<sup>7</sup> Detroit Residential Parcel Survey: <http://www.detroitparcelsurvey.org>.

**EXHIBIT 1**  
**Detroit's Size is Part of the Challenge<sup>8</sup>**



Detroit has the highest poverty rate (36% in 2010) of any large American city, and 51% of its children are poor.<sup>9</sup> Kids Count 2010 says that 54% of children in Detroit live in poverty. March 2011 unemployment stood at 13% for the Detroit-Livonia-Dearborn area,<sup>10</sup> while 83% of youth 16 to 19 were unemployed in 2009.<sup>11</sup> Of residents age 25 or higher, 87% have only a high school diploma or GED or higher. And Michigan's young adults are leaving the state: just 12% of the population is aged 25-34 (44<sup>th</sup> in the nation). Finally, compared to other metro areas, Detroit has among the highest rates of black/white segregation and a wide gap in income attainment between blacks and whites.<sup>12</sup>

<sup>8</sup> [http://arch.udmercy.edu/dc/De\\_Troit-Map.html](http://arch.udmercy.edu/dc/De_Troit-Map.html), 2009.

<sup>9</sup> <http://datacenter.kidscount.org/data/bystate/stateprofile.aspx?state=MI&loc=58>

<sup>10</sup> Bureau of labor Statistics, Metropolitan Area Employment and Unemployment Summary, Wednesday, April 27, 2011. Detroit's Mayor Bing suggested that the true rate was closer to 50% and in some spots up to 80%.

<sup>11</sup> <http://datacenter.kidscount.org/data/bystate/stateprofile.aspx?state=MI&loc=58>

<sup>12</sup> One D Scorecard, [www.onedscorecard.org](http://www.onedscorecard.org) (2010).

## CHALLENGES

- High poverty
- Collapse of the automobile industry
- High foreclosure rate
- High unemployment rate
- Shrinking population
- Brain drain
- Racial disparities and divides
- Public schools in receivership with many closings
- Low education levels
- High rates of crime and violence
- Food insecurity and hunger
- Government in turmoil - 3 mayors in 1 year & indictments of several politicians
- Budget deficits
- Vast geographic landscape

On the education front, the Detroit Public Schools are under state-ordered receivership. In summer 2009, officials initiated a massive downsizing to address a \$327 million deficit, and the plan ultimately called for closing 70 schools over two years.<sup>13</sup>

In short, conditions in Detroit were, and are, daunting.

Yet Detroit has many assets as well. The city has attracted major investments and support from initiatives that align with GN/GS goals, such as the new Living Cities Integration Initiative (up to \$23 million in grants, loans, and Program-Related Investments<sup>14</sup> to fight out-migration and “redensify” the urban core by improving safety, schools, employment, and small business opportunities<sup>15</sup>) and the Local Initiatives Support Corporation Financial Opportunity Center

Program (financial literacy, employment services, and public benefits support in low-income communities).

In addition, Detroit is in the midst of several local initiatives (aligned, or potentially aligned, with GN/GS goals), such as the Mayor’s Detroit Works Project, and local partners have shown and continue to show commitment to Detroit. For example, the DTE Energy Foundation is supporting summer jobs for youth in Metropolitan Detroit – its \$500,000 grant supported City Connect Detroit’s “Grow Detroit’s Young Talent” program in 2011.<sup>16</sup>

With this context and these challenges and opportunities in mind, The Skillman Foundation developed a new approach to working in Detroit.

## ASSETS

- Lower rates of property and violent crime
- Rising shares of adults with a college degree
- Woodward Corridor development
- Mayor’s efforts to “right size” the City
- Ability to attract major investments
- New level of attention to Detroit Public Schools
- Collaboration among foundations, the private sector, and the Mayor’s Office

<sup>13</sup> Detroit Public Schools Renaissance 2012 Plan Overview, April 2011.

<sup>14</sup> Program-Related Investments are low-cost loans that support charitable activity.

<sup>15</sup> <http://backend.livingcities.org/backend.livingcities.org/files/Detroit.pdf> (October 2010)

<sup>16</sup> <http://www.marketwatch.com/story/dte-energy-foundation-and-city-connect-detroit-partner-to-provide-333-summer-jobs-to-youth-in-detroit-and-its-surrounding-suburbs-2011-03-22>

## C. A NEW APPROACH TO WORKING IN DETROIT<sup>17</sup>

*Change or die – that’s what history teaches us. This sustainability plan is The Skillman Foundation’s attempt to change. We are remaking ourselves so we can help Detroit change.*

—Letter from Carol Goss, President and CEO, *Mapping the Road to Good*,  
2007 Sustainability Plan

The seeds for The Skillman Foundation’s new approach to change can be found in Carol Goss’ comments shortly after she became President and CEO in late 2004.

“We now know that if we are going to make a substantial difference in the lives of children and change the communities and neighborhoods in which they live, we must get closer, work harder, reach out even further.”<sup>18</sup>

As noted in the introductory section, the Foundation in 2006 formally embarked on a new approach to “change the odds for kids” with a 10-year, \$100 million commitment that aims to ensure that children living in six Detroit neighborhoods – Brightmoor, Chadsey Condon, Cody Rouge, Northend Central Woodward, Osborn, and Southwest Detroit (see Exhibit 1)<sup>19</sup> – are safe, healthy, well-educated, and prepared for adulthood. The goal was to “transform neighborhoods with children in the most need with the least resources into safe, supportive and productive environments for children, youth and their families in the city of Detroit and its surrounding communities.”<sup>20</sup> In 2007, the Foundation created the Good Schools Program. Its overall work, brought together in 2008, became known as the “Good Neighborhoods and Good Schools” (GN/GS) Initiative. Also as described earlier, this new place-based approach involves a range of neighborhood, school- and system-change strategies, in concert with various public and private partners, residents, and other stakeholders.

It is important to note at this juncture that the global economic downturn beginning in 2008 occurred two years after the Foundation launched Good Neighborhoods, creating additional challenges of a reduced endowment, hence a smaller pool of grant funds, and leveraging other strained resources.

This section summarizes how the Foundation moved to its new approach through planning, strategizing, and action.

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<sup>17</sup> While this section sets forth events and activities in a relatively linear manner, the process was iterative in reality; many modifications were made along the way to the frameworks and models described herein.

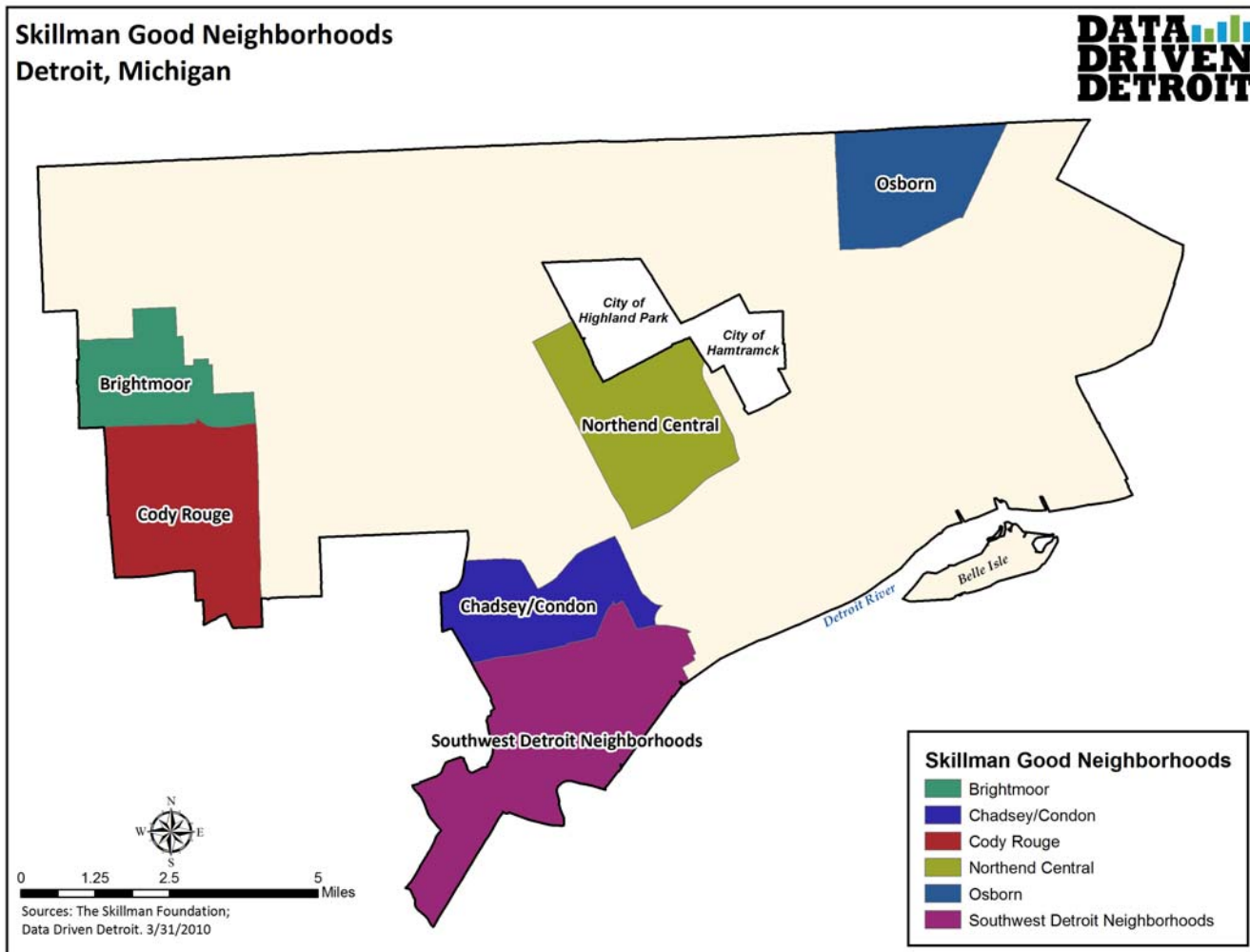
<sup>18</sup> <http://www.skillman.org/news-events/press-releases/index.cfm?i=24356&y=2011>

<sup>19</sup> The common or shorthand names for the neighborhoods will be used from this point: Brightmoor, Chadsey Condon, Cody Rouge, Northend, Osborn and Southwest.

<sup>20</sup> Tonya Allen, Memorandum to Trustees, *Framework for Neighborhood Strategy*, February 8, 2005.



## EXHIBIT 1



### *Developing the Vision: Seven Pillars, Theory of Change, and Logic Model*

Undergirding the GN plan was what the Foundation called the “Seven Pillars of Neighborhood Work” (Exhibit 2). These statements expressed the Foundation’s basic philosophy toward the new efforts.

By early 2007, during the Planning Phase, the Foundation created an operating Theory of Change (TOC) for its new approach as well as a logic model. The TOC (see Exhibit 3) identified in broad terms how the Foundation planned to achieve its long-term goals: working with residents, stakeholders, teachers, nonprofits, partners, and other foundations and investors, the Foundation planned to employ both changemaking and grantmaking strategies<sup>21</sup> to implement three programs, Good Neighborhoods, Good Schools, and Good Opportunities.<sup>22</sup> These programs were designed to create a critical mass of individuals and organizations to invest in the work and transform systems that impact children; in turn,

<sup>21</sup> Changemaking and grantmaking strategies will be discussed in more detail later in this section.

<sup>22</sup> Good Opportunities is a resource with a small portfolio for opportunistic grantmaking that falls outside of the Good Neighborhoods and Good Schools programs but advances the work.

these investments were intended to improve the chances for children and youth to be safe, healthy, well educated and prepared for adulthood.<sup>23</sup>

## EXHIBIT 2

### SEVEN PILLARS OF NEIGHBORHOOD WORK

1. Maximize the assets, capacity and impact of resources and institutions in targeted communities.
2. Establish effective neighborhood-based human service delivery systems for children, youth and families.
3. Improve the availability of child friendly spaces and the physical infrastructure of neighborhoods with large concentrations of children.
4. Build the resiliency of children and families through wealth building strategies.
5. Increase opportunities for quality out-of-school time and youth development programs available to children and youth.
6. Increase public and private investments in neighborhoods to strengthen services and impact.
7. Enable a cadre of “natural helpers” who are committed to providing services or supports for children.

-Skillman Trustees, February 8, 2005

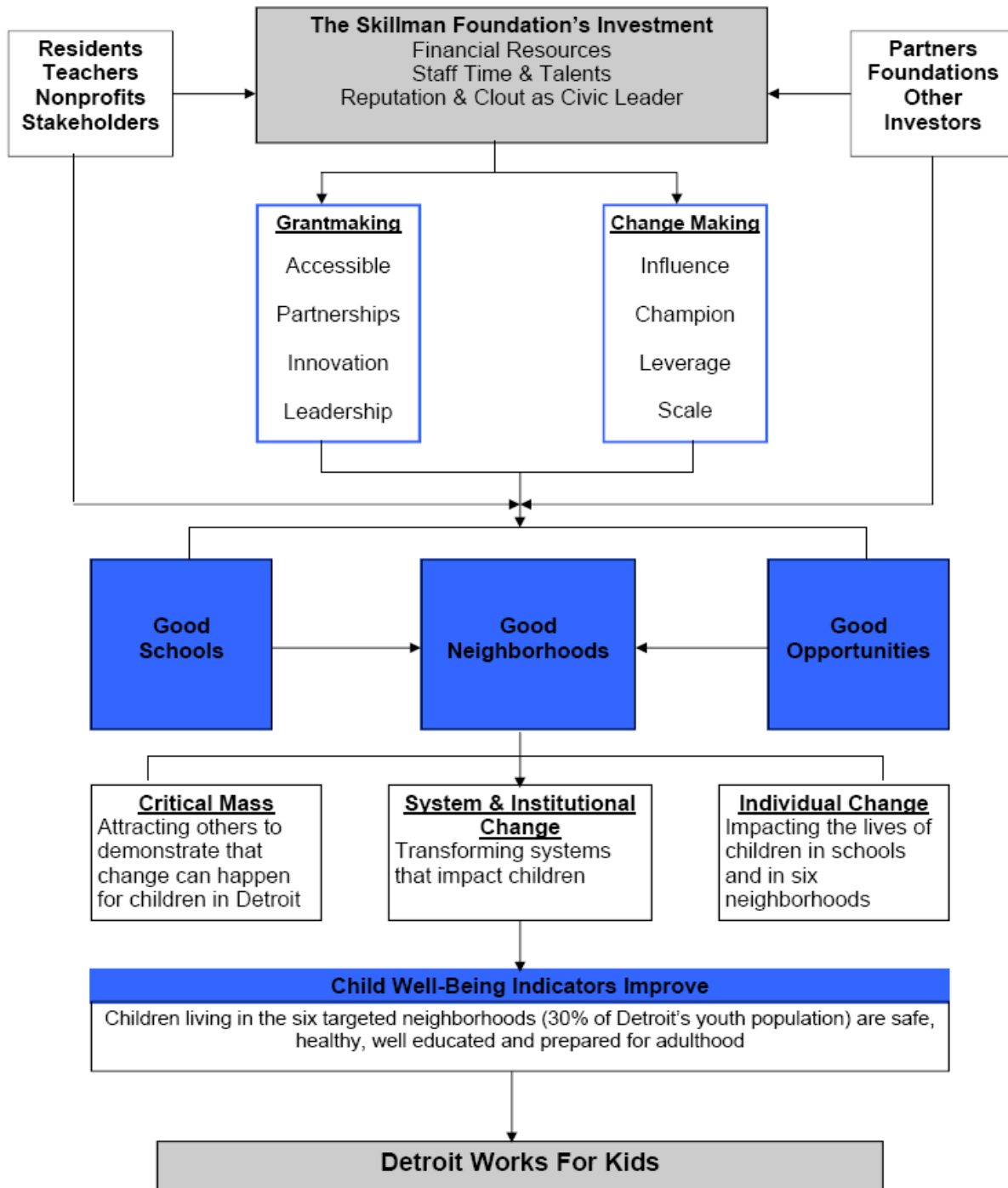
The logic model (Exhibit 4) accompanying the TOC operationalized the new approach. It connected the Foundation’s strategies and activities, resources, and results and communicated the goals of the work, thereby providing a reference point for stakeholders.

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<sup>23</sup> The Skillman Foundation, Sustainability Plan, February 2007.

EXHIBIT 3<sup>24</sup>

Exhibit 1: Theory of Change: Changing the Odds for Children, Not Just Beating Them



<sup>24</sup> Ibid. Note: the chart is imported from another document in which it was labeled Exhibit 1.

**EXHIBIT 4  
FOUNDATION LOGIC MODEL FOR STRATEGIES AND ACTIVITIES<sup>25</sup>**

**Make Detroit Work for Children**  
To ensure that all children living in the six targeted neighborhoods are safe, healthy, well educated and prepared for adulthood

**GRANTMAKING STRATEGIES**

**Strategy 1:** Increase **Accessibility** to Quality Services, Programs and Opportunities

**Strategy 2:** Spur **Innovations** that Benefit Children and Families

**Strategy 3:** Acknowledge that **Leadership** Matters

**Strategy 4:** Promote **Partnerships** that Advance a Children's Agenda

**KEY ACTIVITIES**

- Good Schools**
1. Increase student achievement through the Making the Grade Initiative by encouraging, recognizing and growing high achieving schools, especially in targeted neighborhoods
  2. Increase high school graduation rates and college enrollment with a college attendance campaign and programs that increase achievement
  3. Develop partnerships to innovate good, small high schools
  4. Develop quality, universal pre-school for all 4 year olds in select Neighborhoods
- Good Neighborhoods**
1. Target 6 neighborhoods with many children and many needs
  2. Concentrate successful programs and youth development programs that operate in a network of services for all children, ages 0-18
  3. Support natural helpers and leaders, and build upon community assets to help children
  4. Build income, assets and wealth for families
  5. Improve the conditions of neighborhoods so that they are supportive and child friendly spaces
- Good Opportunities**
1. Support big projects that advance the Good Schools and/or Good Neighborhoods pathways
  2. Invest in projects that have broad impact and implications for children in Southeastern Michigan
  3. Honor the donor legacy of Rose Skillman

**INDICATORS**

- School Readiness
  - Academic Achievement
  - Reading & Math Proficiency
  - High-School Completion/ Drop-out Rates
  - Truancy
  - Youth Enrolling in College
  - College Completion
- Family Economic Security
  - Perception of Community, Safety & Support
  - Decreased Child Abuse & Neglect
  - Decreased Juvenile Crime & Victimization
  - Childhood Obesity
  - Decreased Alcohol, Drug & Tobacco Use
  - Food Security
  - Recreation
  - Youth Civically Involved
  - Youth Served by Youth Programs
  - Employment of Youth
  - Learning & Cultural Activities
  - Increase adult & youth volunteerism

**CHANGE MAKING STRATEGIES**

**Strategy 1:** **Influence** decisions and agendas so that they benefit children.

**Strategy 2:** Seek **champions** to invest, identify and attract others to our work.

**Strategy 3:** **Leverage** our resources to have a bigger impact.

**Strategy 4:** Reach **scale** so that all children do better.

1. Impact policy, decision makers and leaders to support our agenda or to realign their efforts with ours.
2. Identify foundations, civic leaders and government entities to champion each of the key strategies in the Good Schools and Good Neighborhoods Pathway
3. Leverage our resources 5 to 1 so that we increase the impact of our investments
4. Impact the 30% of Detroit's children that live in the six targeted neighborhoods
5. Increase student achievement outcomes in 2/3 of all schools in Detroit

- Increased state funding
- Increased neighborhood Investors & investments
- Improved child well-being Indicators
- Improved city services

<sup>25</sup> Ibid.

*Filling in Details of the Vision*

The Foundation recognized that to have a better chance of accomplishing its GN/GS goals, it needed to change the way it operated from a “buyer“ to a “builder,” a distinction outlined to Trustees in a memo at a September 2008 meeting. The Senior Leadership explained, “We have aligned our work with a new breed of philanthropy that believes that there can be a more effective social sector. We espouse an engaged investment vs. a funder orientation.” Using the 2008 memo, Exhibit 5 compares these orientations.

**EXHIBIT 5  
BUYER VS BUILDER MODEL<sup>26</sup>**

<b>BUYER/FUNDER</b>	<b>VS</b>	<b>BUILDER/ENGAGED INVESTOR</b>
Establishes program areas and invites application submissions. Reacts to applications received.		Establishes desired outcomes and designs program areas accordingly. Proactively seeks best submissions to uncover the widest possible range of promising opportunities related to its interests.
Selects partners by using an application process with criteria such as need, work plan, quality of proposal writing, evaluation design, etc.		Selects partners by their response to the most critical questions, such as: How does this lead to our outcomes? What results are we buying? How do we build so we get and sustain the best results? What are the chances we get it? Is this the best possible use of our money?
Supports nonprofits as they currently exist. There is no expectation for change. Buys a set of services, thus does not incur any risk.		Supports nonprofits with the expectation for change and sometimes major shifts in direction, recognizing that growth capital, close stewardship, patience, and risk are required.
Spends most of the time at the “front end” making new grants.		Reserves considerable time for the “back end” — understands results from past grants and uses that for future investing.
Buys episodic services without commitment or expectation to purchase again.		Invests to improve and grow services so that the organization can continue to deliver quality and be sustainable.

Reflecting this new approach, two programs, Good Neighborhoods and Good Schools, and two strategies, Grantmaking and Changemaking, dominated the Foundation’s efforts in the planning phase. . These programs and strategies are briefly described below.<sup>27</sup>

**PROGRAMS**

**1. Good Neighborhoods**

The “embedded” approach for GN demanded more focused, hands-on ways of accomplishing goals. The Foundation plays a significant role in the design and implementation of the neighborhood work along with two key neighborhood implementation intermediaries that co-design and guide the community engagement and planning process (National Community Development Institute (NCDI)) and provide on-going technical assistance (University of Michigan School of Social Work Technical Assistance Center (UM TAC)). Foundation officers’ own

<sup>26</sup> Tonya Allen, Memorandum to Trustees, September 2008.

<sup>27</sup> Another area of work that emerged as part of the new approach was systems and policy change: with the Foundation working to influence policy and systems and leverage resources through strategic partnerships and opportunistic ventures to bolster improvements in the six neighborhoods.

knowledge and experience in community change efforts, along with NCDI's expertise in working with communities of color and UM TAC's technical assistance, drove the neighborhood planning and capacity building. Additionally, the Foundation selected Prevention Network to implement the Community Connections Small Grants Program, to award grants of up to \$5,000 to local groups in order to leverage "natural leaders" and "natural helpers" as resources for change and to "respond quickly to community needs, build resident leadership, and empower residents and small nonprofits to help implement programs that will support their community goal."<sup>28</sup> Further, the Foundation made investments in the organizational capacity of a number of key nonprofits in the neighborhoods.

## **2. Good Schools**

Following a long history of investment in education, the Foundation created the Good Schools Program in 2007 to ensure that young people could attend quality schools, graduate from high school, and go to college.<sup>29</sup> The program was designed to work at both systems and neighborhood levels by developing a common vision for excellent schools, catalyzing public will, developing leadership and other essential capacities, recognizing school excellence, enabling families to make informed choices about schools, and establishing an annual report card. The Foundation has funded or helped catalyze educational intermediaries (Excellent Schools Detroit, Michigan State University, Michigan Future High School Accelerator, Greater Detroit Venture Fund, Teach for America, Education Trust) to improve educational quality at both system and neighborhood levels through a variety of interrelated means.

## **STRATEGIES**

### **1. Grantmaking**

Four principles were identified to guide grantmaking, the Foundation's primary work:

1. Increase accessibility to quality services, programs and opportunities.
2. Spur innovations that benefit children and families.
3. Acknowledge that leadership matters.
4. Promote partnerships that advance a children's agenda.

### **2. Changemaking**

The Changemaking plan was to engage champions, leverage resources (with a goal of 5:1), influence policy, develop strategic partnerships, and take the work to scale. In 2007, the Trustees approved a new staff position responsible for managing the Champion strategy, other efforts to leverage resources, and the Foundation's work to influence systems to open opportunities to low-income children and their families.

As discussions evolved, the Foundation articulated two strategies for GN: "Systems of Supports and Opportunities (SOSO)" and "Neighborhood Capacities." The GS Program clarified its strategy as "Neighborhood Schools and Education Reform," and Changemaking as "Systems and Policy Change." Finally, a new strategy was added: "Results-Oriented Learning Organization." At this point the Foundation shifted from identifying the initiative as "Good Neighborhoods" to "Good Neighborhoods and Good Schools."

<sup>28</sup> From Skillman website, "Small grants," <http://www.skillman.org/grants/small-grants>, 2/28/11.

<sup>29</sup> The goals also included universal pre-school access for all 4-year olds.

### *Identifying Intended Outcomes and Indicators*

The following summarizes the intended outcomes of the Readiness Phase for GN:

1. A Foundation plan for a coordinated, accessible, system of supports and opportunities for children and youth, connected to the neighborhood goals, exists in each neighborhood.
2. Each neighborhood has an infrastructure and systems with capacity and resources to implement a community-owned community plan to improve child and youth outcomes.

In addition, intended Readiness Phase outcomes were established for Good Schools, Systems and Policies, and the Foundation as a Results-Oriented Learning Organization.

1. **Good Schools:** (a) a citywide birth-to-college “technical assistance” infrastructure and systems with capacity and resources to implement a reform agenda for Detroit education is in place, (b) diverse public, private and corporate leaders are engaged in and accountable for implementing the vision of the education infrastructure, and (c) opinion leaders take a positive public stand on the unified vision for standards and accountability for the education infrastructure.
2. **Systems and policies:** (a) Significant external investments (leverage) have been made, (b) policies and practices have been changed or advanced, and public awareness increased, (c) new opportunities and partnerships exist, and (d) a plan for scaling efforts is in place.
3. **The Foundation as a results-oriented learning organization:** The Skillman Foundation is opportunistic, entrepreneurial & nimble and focused on long-term outcomes.

As the Readiness Phase work was unfolding, the Foundation selected long-term indicators to define the intended long-term impacts (see Exhibit 6)<sup>30</sup> and the Evaluation and Learning Team<sup>31</sup> worked with Foundation officers and key partners to create a Readiness Phase Evaluation Framework (see Exhibit 7). The impact statement, “young people being safe, healthy, well educated and prepared for adulthood,” served as the touchstone. In the yearlong process, each Foundation officer and partner was engaged individually or as a member of a team to refine the key strategies and develop outcomes and indicators to be used for the Readiness phase evaluation.

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<sup>30</sup> These indicators were designed to be measured through in all 50 Detroit neighborhoods through administrative data (where available) that would be back dated twenty years and go forward with GN/GS to provide context.

<sup>31</sup> The Evaluation and Learning Team was comprised of three members from mid-2007 to early 2010: Marie Colombo, Sr. Program Officer for Knowledge Management, Prue Brown, independent consultant, and Della M. Hughes, Co-PI for evaluation and learning, Brandeis University. Susan P. Curnan, PI for 2016 Task Force management, Brandeis University, joined the team in early 2010.

**EXHIBIT 6  
LONG-TERM INDICATORS**

<b>SAFE &amp; HEALTHY</b>	<b>WELL EDUCATED</b>	<b>PREPARED FOR ADULTHOOD</b>
Juvenile crime	High school graduation	Teen employment
Teen deaths	Teen enrollment in college and post-secondary training	Teen births

**EXHIBIT 7  
READINESS PHASE EVALUATION FRAMEWORK**

**SYSTEMS OF SUPPORTS AND OPPORTUNITIES**

<b>OUTCOME</b>	<b>INDICATORS</b>
A foundation plan for a coordinated, accessible, system of supports & opportunities for children & youth connected to the neighborhood goals exists in each neighborhood	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Assessment of resources, gaps and quality in the system of supports &amp; opportunities for children and youth and initial support to address these gaps and opportunities, including transportation. The characteristics of a strong system of support and opportunities for youth are:               <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Accessible (no geographical, financial, scheduling barriers)</li> <li>▪ High quality</li> <li>▪ Responsive to child, youth, and family developmental needs, preferences, and cultural backgrounds with particular attention to opportunities that strengthen outcomes for African American &amp; Hispanic boys in neighborhoods &amp; schools</li> <li>▪ Coordinated (operating well as a system)</li> <li>▪ Comprehensive (no significant gaps)</li> <li>▪ Known about and used by children, youth, and families</li> <li>▪ Operating at significant scale (reaching a significant proportion of children and youth)</li> <li>▪ Sustainable</li> </ul> </li> <li>▪ A data-informed grantmaking plan &amp; initial actions (e.g., youth development intermediaries) that are directly connected to 2016 goals &amp; how the Foundation operates that promote development of a system of supports and opportunities that includes services, programs, and relationships that are delivered by nonprofits, schools, government agencies, families and informal groups.</li> <li>▪ More effective community organizations serving the community</li> </ul>
Visible results in the form of physical improvements or other tangible changes directly linked to GN/GS long-term goals	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Community arts projects</li> <li>▪ Leveraged resources for improvements to school buildings &amp; facilities</li> <li>▪ Leveraged resources for improvements to residential and commercial areas</li> <li>▪ Improvements to neighborhood parks</li> <li>▪ Signature project identified for each neighborhood</li> </ul>



## NEIGHBORHOOD CAPACITIES

OUTCOME	INDICATORS
<p>Neighborhood infrastructure &amp; systems with capacity &amp; resources to implement a community-owned community plan to improve child &amp; youth outcomes</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Community plan directly connected to GN/GS long-term goals; vetted by residents, key neighborhood organizations &amp; other stakeholders, &amp; supported by outside organizations working in the neighborhoods</li> <li>▪ Nonprofit capacity to support implementation of the community plan</li> <li>▪ Resident &amp; stakeholder leadership to support implementation of the community plan including engagement in policy agenda development &amp; advocacy</li> <li>▪ Effective structure in the neighborhoods for decision-making, management &amp; accountability               <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>✓ Ability to govern, set &amp; implement goals, track progress, establish &amp; manage accountability system, work through challenges, &amp; learn while doing (capacity for self evaluation)</li> <li>✓ Ability to connect with &amp; make the case for the community plan &amp; leverage relationships with institutions &amp; resources (time, knowledge, and money) both within &amp; outside of the neighborhoods</li> <li>✓ Effective vehicle for communication in each neighborhood</li> </ul> </li> <li>▪ Increasing number and representation of residents including youth involved in creating &amp; sustaining the community plan</li> <li>▪ Strengthened set of community networks &amp; working relationships among cultural identity groups</li> </ul>

## SYSTEM REFORM & NEIGHBORHOOD SCHOOLS

OUTCOME	INDICATORS
<p>A citywide birth-to-college “technical assistance” infrastructure and systems with capacity and resources to implement a reform agenda for Detroit education.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ “Technical assistance” resources for implementation and support for high quality early care and education, and elementary, middle and high schools.</li> <li>▪ External accountability system for the infrastructures.</li> <li>▪ Reliable, independent data used to inform education decisions.</li> <li>▪ Portfolio of organizations that link to public policy at local, state and federal levels.</li> <li>▪ Capacity for developing and sustaining public will focused on academic achievement.</li> </ul>
<p>Diverse public, private and corporate leaders are engaged in and accountable for implementing the vision of the education infrastructure.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Public, private and corporate leaders are identified as educational champions</li> <li>▪ Champions are knowledgeable and engaged in implementing the vision</li> </ul>
<p>Opinion leaders take a positive public stand on the unified vision for standards and accountability for the education infrastructure.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Mayor and other public leaders make a strong, positive public statement about the vision for high quality schools for every child and youth</li> </ul>

## SYSTEMS AND POLICIES

OUTCOME	INDICATORS
Significant external investments (Champions)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ An investment pipeline in each of the neighborhoods</li> <li>▪ New Economy Initiative funds invested in neighborhoods &amp; with low-wealth families</li> <li>▪ Champions engaged in three neighborhoods and second cohort identified</li> <li>▪ Cohesive plan with multiple, including regional, funders to support good schools &amp; sustain existing partnerships in schools</li> <li>▪ Two national foundations invest in GN/GS</li> </ul>
Policies and practices changed or advanced  Increased public awareness of GN/GS efforts (Influence)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ A formal policy agenda &amp; plan for intended changes</li> <li>▪ Vehicles for influencing policy decisions activated</li> <li>▪ Champions increase the public discourse on issues related to Skillman’s policy agenda</li> <li>▪ The policy agenda has been advanced.</li> <li>▪ Supporting communication strategy for change making, grant making, leverage &amp; scaling efforts</li> <li>▪ Disseminate lessons in local, regional &amp; national venues, including philanthropic media</li> <li>▪ Publish reports, articles, op eds, etc. that promote the children’s agenda</li> <li>▪ New website launched</li> <li>▪ Print &amp; media partnerships</li> <li>▪ Publish a state of the children indicators report annually</li> <li>▪ The Foundation’s agenda for children is recognized as part of a larger regional discussion</li> </ul>
Strategic partners (Leverage)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Increased collaboration and alignment among strategic partners</li> <li>▪ Increased level of financial, in-kind, and human resources donated by partners and foundations</li> </ul>
Plan for scaling GN/GS efforts (Scale)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Formal plan that identifies public &amp; private resources for scaling up</li> <li>▪ Increased knowledge about &amp; connections to public officials and potential resources</li> </ul>

## RESULTS-ORIENTED LEARNING ORGANIZATION

OUTCOME	INDICATORS
TSF is opportunistic, entrepreneurial & nimble & focused on long-term outcomes	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Evidence of alignment and synergy among GN, GS, CM, GM, and KM efforts</li> <li>▪ Foundation staff, partners, residents, neighborhood teams, &amp; stakeholders: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ have a shared vision</li> <li>○ own a feasible plan for the overall Readiness Phase &amp; for each partner</li> <li>○ have the knowledge, skills &amp; abilities to catalyze &amp; manage change</li> <li>○ demonstrate continuous improvement &amp; alignment of theory of change, strategies &amp; outcomes</li> <li>○ have resources (including time) required to implement the community plan</li> <li>○ use evaluation as a management &amp; learning tool</li> <li>○ have and use accountability mechanisms</li> </ul> </li> <li>▪ Consistent use of an “opportunities” decision making process</li> <li>▪ CEP surveys of Trustees, staff, grantees &amp; stakeholders used for learning &amp; improvement</li> <li>▪ Foundation policies &amp; practices that lead to high performance &amp; support new ways of working</li> <li>▪ Evaluation is used as a management and learning tool</li> <li>▪ Feasible community data management system secured &amp; initial baseline established</li> <li>▪ Foundation tracking mechanism to capture leverage data established</li> <li>▪ Implementation and outcomes evaluations conducted</li> </ul>

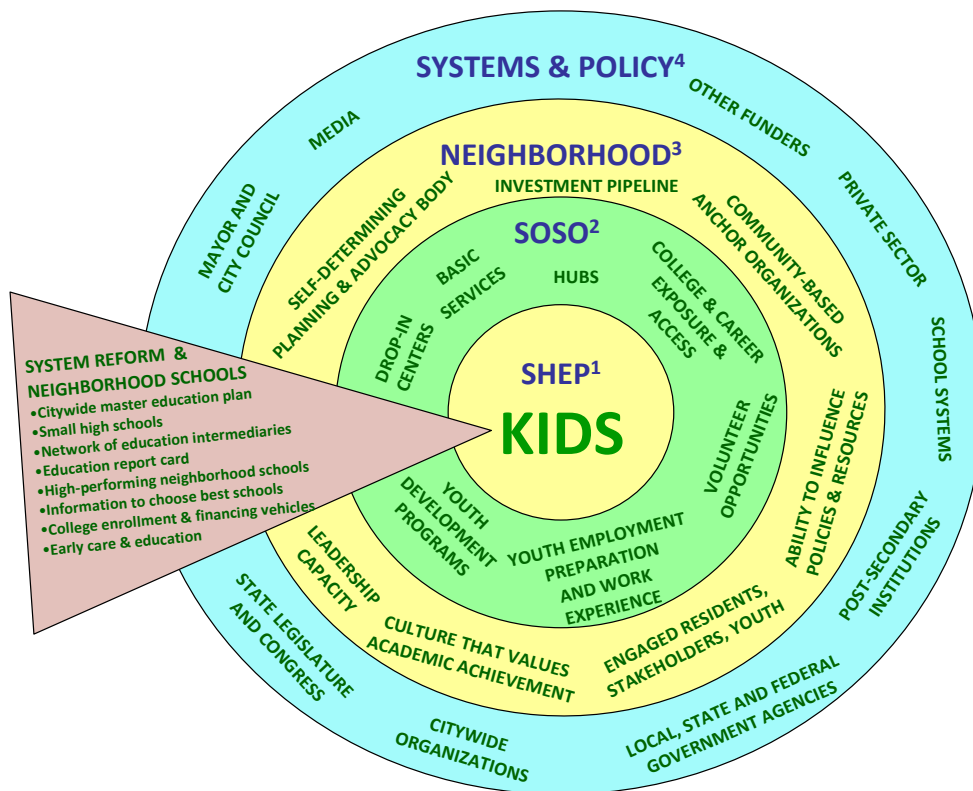
### *Initiative Theory of Change, Ecological Model, and 2016 Goals*

Following the evaluation framework development, the Evaluation and Learning Team articulated the initiative TOC (distinct from the TOC described earlier) to expand on the long-term goals (safe, healthy, well educated, and prepared for adulthood) and developed an ecological model to display the interconnections among the strategies (see Exhibit 8). The GN/GS initiative TOC states:

Young people are more likely to be safe, healthy, well educated and prepared for adulthood (1) when they are embedded in a strong system of supports and opportunities, (2) when they attend high quality schools, (3) when their neighborhoods have the capacities and resources to support youth and families, and (4) when broader systems and policies create conditions under which youth can thrive.

The ecological model recognizes that the Foundation’s work exists in a political, economic and social context that influences how strategies are translated into feasible tactics. A breakthrough occurred when Foundation officers conceptualized the Neighborhood Schools and Education Reform work as a wedge that cut across the circles of the ecological model, showing that the neighborhood and system work for education is conducted often simultaneously across the circles.

**EXHIBIT 8  
GOOD NEIGHBORHOODS AND GOOD SCHOOLS ECOLOGICAL MODEL**



<sup>1</sup> SHEP = Long-term youth outcomes: Safe and Healthy, Well Educated, and Prepared for Adulthood  
<sup>2</sup> SOSO = System of Supports and Opportunities  
<sup>3</sup> Neighborhood = Individual, Organizational and Neighborhood Capacities  
<sup>4</sup> Systems & Policy = Strategies that permeate each circle and include both intentional and opportunistic activities

Finally, in 2009, the Foundation established targets for the end of the GN/GS Implementation Phase (see Exhibit 9), called the 2016 Goals. The evaluation framework, initiative TOC, ecological model, and 2016 Goals – each of which led to further clarity – are all intertwined with **learning** about the work underway.

## EXHIBIT 9 GOOD NEIGHBORHOODS AND GOOD SCHOOLS 2016 GOALS

The following 2016 goals assume grantmaking, changemaking or a combination of grantmaking and changemaking approaches. Each goal also has specific 2012 benchmarks identified. The Skillman Foundation commits to make these goals happen and be held publicly accountable for them. It is anticipated that additional activities will occur in the neighborhoods through support from other funders.

### SCHOOLS

**By the end of 2016, children and youth will have improved educational opportunities as defined by:**

1. **51% of school-age youth have access to “almost there” or “high performing” schools in or near their neighborhood**
  - 2012 benchmark: each neighborhood has at least one “almost there” or “high performing” elementary, middle and high school
2. **80% of households with school-age children receive information to choose the best school**
  - 2012 benchmark: 50% of households receive information
3. **50% of children ages birth to 5 receive high-quality early care and education experiences independently verified as high quality in or near their neighborhood**
  - 2012 benchmark: 25% of children ages birth to 5 receive early care and education experiences
4. **A vehicle for assisting with college enrollment and financing post-secondary education**
  - 2012 benchmark: A pilot has been launched to assist with college enrollment and financing post-secondary education
5. **A portfolio of 30 high quality small high schools in the city**
  - 2012 benchmark: 15 high quality small high schools in the city
6. **A citywide master education plan is being implemented and governance is in place**
  - 2012 benchmark: The city has adopted a master education plan
7. **Self-sustaining network of educational intermediaries (e.g., data consortium, Venture Fund, MI Futures High School Accelerator, Institute for Student Achievement, YES for Prep, Edison, Teach for America, Parent Development)**
  - 2012 benchmark: A network of educational intermediaries is in place
8. **Educational report card is published annually**
  - 2012 benchmark: An educational report card has been submitted to the Mayor

### SYSTEM OF SUPPORTS AND OPPORTUNITIES

**By the end of 2016 the system of supports and opportunities will be strengthened to include:**

1. **A diverse array of youth development experiences engaging 80% of youth ages 11-18 in one or more diverse program offerings and/or work, volunteer, or career experiences. This means that each neighborhood will have:**
  - a. 3-5 high-quality hubs<sup>32</sup> that serve 60% of 11-18 year olds and their families
    - 2012 benchmark: 3 hubs that serve 40%
  - b. Drop-in center programs that serve 20% of 11-18 year olds
    - 2012 benchmark: drop-in center programs serving 10%
  - c. A variety of youth development academic enrichment, character building and leadership programs,

<sup>32</sup> Hub = a cluster of activities, including community schools, in safe child and family friendly spaces that are geographically proximate (walking distance)

- such as service learning; math, science and technology; sports and recreation; arts and culture; homework assistance and tutoring that serve 75% of 11-18 year olds
  - 2012 benchmark: youth development programs serving 40%
- d. Youth employment preparation and employment opportunities that serve 40% of 14-18 year olds
  - 2012 benchmark: youth employment 20%
- e. Volunteer and college and career exposure opportunities that serve 75% of 14-18 year olds
  - 2012 benchmark: volunteer & career 40%

#### **SYSTEM OF SUPPORTS AND OPPORTUNITIES**

**By the end of 2016 the system of supports and opportunities will be strengthened to include:**

- 2. Basic services are available to children and their families to include:**
  - a. Accessible (cost & geographically proximate) health clinic(s) serving children ages birth to 18
    - 2012 benchmark: same
  - b. Tax and public benefits assistance
    - 2012 benchmark: at least one such program
  - c. High-need food resource
    - 2012 benchmark: at least one such program
  - d. Adult access to work

#### **NEIGHBORHOOD CAPACITIES**

**By the end of 2016 each neighborhood will develop the following capacities and assets:**

- 1. A sustainable self-determining planning and advocacy body of residents and stakeholders that grows and improves the neighborhood for children**
  - 2012 benchmark: it is an active operating group that connects the neighborhood to city policy makers
  - **2016: in addition to an active and sustainable group in each neighborhood, there is a cross-neighborhood policy council**
- 2. 10% of residents, stakeholders and youth are engaged in DWK activities**
  - 2012 benchmark: 5% engagement
- 3. 1% of residents, stakeholders and youth are engaged in DWK activities (such as the Leadership Academy, policy training, Youth Councils, governance bodies, Small Grants Review Panel) to build sustained youth and adult leadership**
  - 2012 benchmark: .5% engagement
- 4. 3-5 community-based anchor<sup>33</sup> organizations**
  - 2012 benchmark: 3 anchors per neighborhood
- 5. The neighborhood culture values kids. This means that in each neighborhood:**  
There is an increase in caring adults (coaches, tutors, mentors, etc.) & culture in the neighborhood values academic achievement for every child
- 6. There is a sustainable pipeline of public and private resources**
- 7. An ability to influence policies and resources to benefit the neighborhood, including:<sup>34</sup>**
  - a. Residents and stakeholders who have capacity to influence the schools and other organizations and factors affecting their neighborhood
  - b. Policy-makers who know and have relationships with the neighborhood
  - c. Residents and stakeholders who have the ability to mobilize public will

<sup>33</sup> Anchor = community-based organizations that have the expertise, and financial and leadership stability to sustain and advance the neighborhood's agenda for children. These organizations may or may not be part of a hub.

<sup>34</sup> Specific 2016 goals and 2012 benchmarks have yet to be determined for this goal as well as some above.

#### **SYSTEMS AND POLICIES AFFECTING NEIGHBORHOODS (OPPORTUNISTIC)**

1. Models of system integration, such as foster care and prisoner re-entry
2. Leveraging public and private resources to support and sustain neighborhood projects, such as
  - Foreclosure prevention
  - Availability of healthy food
  - Access to work

The 2016 goals provided better definition for the ecological model and to partners as they planned their work for the longer term.<sup>35</sup> At the time the goals were developed, Foundation officers made informed estimates of numerical targets, but these estimates will be revised based on the results of the SOSO assessment, completion of the Readiness Phase evaluation, and the development of a process to ensure broad ownership among key stakeholders in defining targets and benchmarks.

Finally, the work on the ground, combined with reflection on the evaluation framework, initiative TOC, ecological model, and 2016 Goals, generated insights between and among the Foundation, the implementation partners, neighborhoods, and other GN/GS stakeholders, which set the stage for refining the action to occur during the Implementation Phase.

Exhibit 10 shows several points of the evolution of the GN/GS initiative through the three phases. The Readiness Phase used for the neighborhood work gave the Foundation and its partners time to engage the community, get clarity in assumptions underpinning the initiative, focus the strategies, identify intended outcomes, build capacity, surface tensions in the theory of change and action, and begin to refine and integrate the strands of the work. Further, it provided time for Good Schools to develop its new focus and body of work for the overall Foundation effort.

#### *The Foundation's Financial Investment and Leveraging*

Important context for the array of strategies and activities in which the Foundation engaged during the Planning and Readiness Phases is the amount of funds actually invested and the extent to which they were leveraged. According to Foundation records, by 2010 Skillman had spent about \$48 million on *Good Neighborhoods* (60% for developing neighborhood capacities and 40% for systems of supports and opportunities).<sup>36</sup> The Foundation's investment leverage goal of 5:1 focused chiefly on the neighborhoods. Foundation records show that over the three-year Readiness Phase, it leveraged nearly 6.3:1 in all its neighborhood investments.

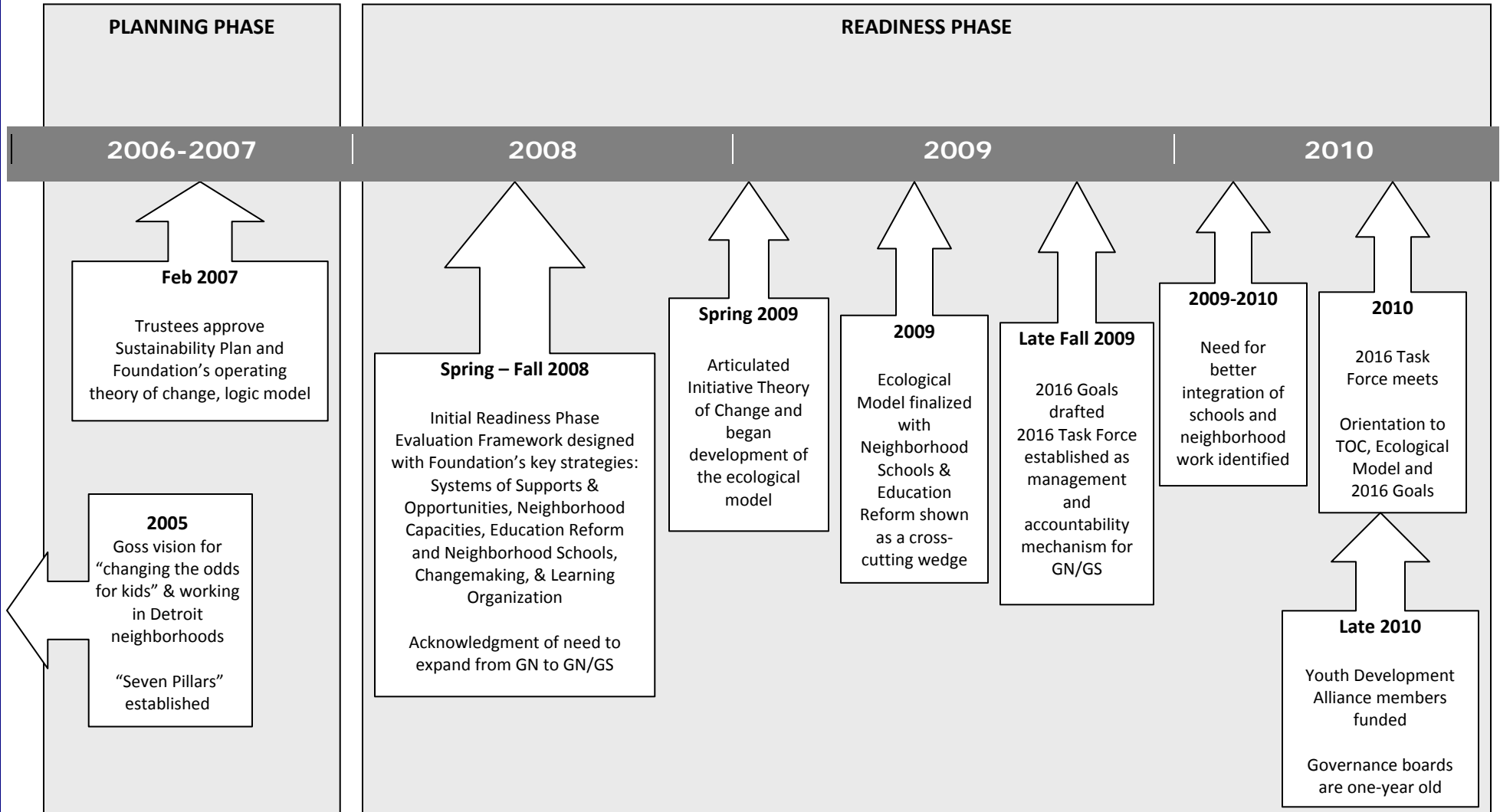
Between the years 2006-2010 the Foundation spent an additional \$43 million on *Good Schools* for education reform and school improvement in Detroit (approximately \$13 million in the six neighborhoods). The Good Schools and overall leveraging was clarified by the VP of Programs in a 2010 memorandum: "... Since 2007, schools' leverage has grown from 3 percent to 37 percent in both 2009 and 2010. If the Foundation were to measure its leverage amount according to the entire grantmaking budget, which includes schools, neighborhoods and good opportunities, the leverage ratio for this year is 3.3:1."<sup>37</sup>

<sup>35</sup> Number 4 in the 2016 Goals, "Systems and Policies Affecting Neighborhoods," was the least defined of the four areas in part due to a transition in staffing of the Senior Program Officer for Changemaking.

<sup>36</sup> Colombo, Memorandum to Trustees, June 2011.

<sup>37</sup> Ibid.

**EXHIBIT 10**  
**GOOD NEIGHBORHOODS AND GOOD SCHOOLS**  
**Readiness Phase Evolution**  
**2008-2010**



## D. READINESS PHASE COMPILATION REPORT OVERVIEW

The Readiness Phase evaluation report, structured as a portfolio of evaluation summaries, chronicles the background, progress, and challenges of the chief Readiness Phase strategies: Systems of Supports and Opportunities (SOSO), Neighborhood Capacities, Education Reform and Neighborhood Schools, Systems and Policies, and Results-Oriented Learning Organization. The report is the result of four years of evaluation and learning activities designed to assess the results of GN/GS. The Center for Youth and Communities at The Heller School for Social Policy and Management at Brandeis University<sup>38</sup> has been assessing GN/GS efforts for these four years, and for this report directly coordinated the work on SOSO, Neighborhood Capacities, and Systems and Policies. (The Brandeis team included J.F. M. Consulting of Detroit, who played a major role over the last three years in evaluating the progress of neighborhood-focused strategies.) In 2010-2011, the Foundation added evaluators to study specific aspects of the work: Touchstone Center for Collaborative Inquiry (Small Grants Program), Institute for Research and Reform in Education (Good Schools), Wayne State University School of Social Work (organizational capacity building), Signet Consulting (the Foundation as a learning organization), and George Galster (quantitative indicators of neighborhood context).

The Readiness Phase compilation report draws on the four years of Brandeis evaluations and the evaluations conducted by the entities listed above to provide the Foundation with an analysis of the implementation of the GN/GS theory of change by:

- Evaluating progress towards the Readiness Phase evaluation outcomes.
- Assessing readiness to achieve the 2016 goals.
- Making recommendations for learning and improvement for the implementation phase.

For all of the reports together, more than 120 individuals were interviewed, 235 individuals were surveyed, and seven focus groups were conducted involving about 43 people, for a duplicated total of about 400 individuals.

Taken together, these reports suggest that during 2010 the Readiness Phase was maturing with the neighborhood strategies showing signs of fruition, the education strategy becoming more refined and gaining traction, SOSO assessment data informing planning and funding decisions, the formation of the Youth Development Alliance (three youth development lead organizations funded to enhance youth development quality, accessibility and coordination in the neighborhoods), youth employment efforts yielding jobs in the wake of minimal federal funding, a sharpened focus on the plight of African-American and Hispanic boys, and the 2016 Task Force launched as a management and accountability vehicle for the GN/GS initiative. Additionally, new and sometimes unexpected neighborhood improvement opportunities emerged that were generated or influenced by GN/GS tactics, such as resident and stakeholder engagement in education and land use advocacy, Living Cities and LISC investments in Northend, and new efforts in youth violence prevention and foreclosure prevention.

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<sup>38</sup>The Brandeis team was engaged in mid-2007 to build the Foundation's evaluation capacity and provide useful, usable, and timely data for decision-making and continuous improvement; conduct a series of implementation evaluations for the Readiness Phase; and develop an evaluation framework and design for the work in the implementation phase.

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## II. A. CHANGING THE ODDS FOR KIDS

### What Capacity Do the Supports and Opportunities in the Six Good Neighborhoods Provide for Young People and What Characteristics of a System Are in Place?

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#### EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

*Center for Youth and Communities  
The Heller School for Social Policy and Management, Brandeis University*

After years of grant making that had produced some benefits for individual children, but no lasting change in their conditions, The Skillman Foundation shifted its focus to getting deeper and more sustained results that would “change the odds for kids.” In 2006, the Foundation formally embarked on this new approach with a 10-year, \$100 million commitment to the Good Neighborhoods Initiative that aims to ensure that children living in six Detroit neighborhoods—Brightmoor, Chadsey Condon, Cody Rouge, Northend Central Woodward, Osborn, and Southwest Detroit<sup>39</sup>—are safe, healthy, well-educated, and prepared for adulthood. This report comes at the end of the Readiness Phase, the point at which a baseline of the systems of supports and opportunities (SOSO) that exist for the 24,782 young people ages 11-18 in the six Good Neighborhoods is needed. Understanding what is available and to what extent there is coordination, accessibility, high quality, and comprehensiveness is the first step in determining what gaps and challenges exist and what could be done to improve them.

To that end, the Skillman Foundation engaged Brandeis University to assess SOSO in the six neighborhoods. The team designed a protocol for collecting and analyzing the data and (1) reviewed existing documentation on programs and interviewed key partners, and (2) conducted phone surveys with youth development agencies whether funded by the Foundation or not. Between February and June, 2010 Brandeis contacted CEOs, Executive Directors, and program staff from 270 youth programs, operating out of 76 agencies. The assessment addressed the following questions:

Young people are more likely to be safe, healthy, well educated and prepared for adulthood when they are embedded in a strong system of support and opportunities.

—from The Skillman Foundation Theory of Change

1. What capacity does each SOSO have to serve youth and what capacity is needed?
  - What is the approximate number of program opportunities available to youth in each neighborhood? To what extent are these opportunities utilized?
2. To what extent are the characteristics of a strong neighborhood SOSO present? What are the priorities for capacity building?
3. What aspects of the cross-neighborhood or citywide systems need strengthening? What are the priorities for capacity building?

The SOSO survey gathered information about a range of programmatic factors including a) program descriptions and features, b) program quality, c) program accessibility, and d) program coordination. While most questions were close-ended questions, interviewees were asked three open-ended

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<sup>39</sup> Going forward in this report, the common or shorthand names for the neighborhoods will be used: Brightmoor, Chadsey Condon, Cody Rouge, Northend, Osborn and Southwest.

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questions about their perception of a) top youth needs in the neighborhood, b) top challenges youth face in assessing programs, and c) top professional development needs.

This first assessment of the systems of supports and opportunities is intended to produce useful and timely data to the Foundation, youth development system coordinators and neighborhoods. While it is not an exhaustive study of all youth development programs for youth age 11-18, it is a first step towards understanding what exists in the neighborhoods. Not all known program could be interviewed within the limited time frame of this study, not all programs responded to the team's calls, and not all programs could provide data requested in the survey. Nevertheless, the following highlights key findings from this baseline survey:

### **Summary of Findings**

This analysis estimates that about 34% of the youth ages 11-18 in the six neighborhoods participated in youth development programs, with the percentage ranging from 21% in Cody Rouge and the Northend to 67% in Osborn. Given the difficulties in obtaining consistent participation numbers, caution must be used in interpreting the findings; however, they do provide a starting point for planning.

#### ***Availability of Youth Development Programming***

During interviews staff reported extensive programming within neighborhoods. Yet, key categories of programming were limited. Of the 270 programs surveyed, 48% offered life skills, 41% offered leadership development opportunities, 37% offered arts & culture, and 36% offered academic enrichment. Sports & recreation opportunities were offered in 25% of programs. Fewer programs offered mentoring, career preparation and exposure, volunteer activities, employment preparation, and college preparation and access. Across neighborhoods, these findings remain highly consistent. Most programs surveyed operated on a modest scale, serving fewer than 50 youth. Slightly more than half of the programs overall offered meals or snacks, and just over one fourth offered drop-in capacity.

#### ***Quality***

Program quality was assessed by looking at formal youth development training and formal program assessments. The proportion of programs incorporating these aspects of program quality was relatively high, which may be influenced by the Foundation's historic focus on these mechanisms to assure quality. Of programs surveyed, formal youth development training was required for 54% of full-time staff and 37% of part-time staff, while 44% of programs conducted formal program assessments.

#### ***Accessibility***

Transportation was identified as the greatest barrier to accessibility. Transportation to and from the program was low, offered in about 30% of programs, which could seriously limit participation, depending upon the location of youth and proximity to programs. An average of 68% of programs were offered at no cost - a good starting place for ensuring that cost is not a barrier to participation. Few programs had eligibility restrictions.

#### ***Coordination/Collaboration***

Areas of coordination and collaboration among programs both within a particular organization and among organizations varied widely. An average of 61% shared materials/resources; 57% collaborated/shared programming; 55% shared space; 43% planned/scheduled jointly; 33% jointly trained; 31% shared staff; and 11% shared transportation. The inclination to coordinate or collaborate is present and could be a good base from which to build.

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The table below summarizes key characteristics of all programs surveyed:

**SUMMARY OF SELECT SOSO CHARACTERISTICS**

<b>CATEGORY</b>	<b>YOUTH PROGRAMS (N=270)</b>
<b>PROGRAMMING</b>	
Youth Mentoring	20%
Academic Enrichment	36%
Youth Leadership Development	41%
Formal Volunteer Opportunities	18%
Offered as drop-in	26%
Offers meals/snacks	53%
<b>QUALITY</b>	
Youth Development training required for FULL-TIME staff	54%
Youth Development training required for PART-TIME staff	37%
Program Formally Assessed	44%
<b>ACCESSIBILITY</b>	
Transportation TO program	30%
Transportation FROM program	29%
Offered at no cost	69%
<b>COORDINATION/ COLLABORATION</b>	
Shared Materials/Resources	61%
Collaborating/Sharing Programming	57%
Shared Space	55%
Joint Planning/Scheduling	43%
Joint Training	33%
Shared Staff	31%
Shared Transportation	11%



## Summary of Recommendations

The following summary of recommendations is designed to identify the elements of a quality system of supports and opportunities. They have been shaped by the findings in this report—gaps in the overall systems and areas that can be strengthened. The Skillman Foundation has a rich history of grantmaking for quality youth development programming and of refining its investments based on evaluation findings and recommendations. While implementing all of the recommendations suggested at once would be prohibitive cost-wise, many of the elements that require a substantial investment are either in place or in process. The new Youth Development Alliance, a partnership of three youth development lead agencies that each work with two neighborhoods, is specifically designed to build quality systems of supports and opportunities in the six target neighborhoods. Strengthening hubs of out-of-school networks – of schools, faith-based institutions, community agencies, libraries, parks, and cultural centers – can help individual programs link with each other to best provide the “ample array of program opportunities”<sup>40</sup> necessary for young people to be safe, healthy, well educated, and prepared for adulthood, and this approach is on both the Foundation’s and the Alliance’s agendas as well.

**The single most important investment at this stage is in quality: formal youth development training, program quality assessment, and a management information system capable of tracking individuals and handling program data. These three factors will drive the remaining elements of an effective system. That said, four other issues need simultaneous attention:**

- 1. The content of youth development and youth employment and college and career access programming should be aligned with the 2016 Goals as they are revised during 2011.**
- 2. Increase mentoring opportunities—youth are more likely to be able to “change their odds” with one or more caring adults in their lives.** Research has shown that supportive caring adults in the lives of youth serve as a protective factor and are critical to youth’s well-being.<sup>41</sup> One study of urban after-school programs found that the relationships between youth and staff are their greatest strength. Furthermore, matched mentoring, as seen in the Big Brothers Big Sisters program, has been shown to have a significant positive impact on youth.<sup>42</sup> With limited mentoring opportunities in the neighborhoods, formal or informal, greater investment in developing caring adults in the neighborhoods and through programs offering group and one-to-one mentoring relationships are needed.
- 3. Identify one or two high-impact actions that will jump start collaboration of youth development programs with neighborhood schools, neighborhood governance groups, and the Community Connections Small Grants Program to create year-round, student-centered learning opportunities.** A recent report notes, “Year-round learning consists of intentional, community-based efforts to connect school, afterschool, and summer learning to support positive youth outcomes, develop continuous learning pathways, and provide equitable opportunities for both students and families.”<sup>43</sup>
- 4. Executives and senior managers of organizations aspiring to be youth development focused need expertise in learning organization management and implementation.** A commitment to

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<sup>40</sup> Eccles, J. and Gootman, J.A. (eds.) (2002). *Community Programs to Promote Youth Development*. Washington, DC: National Academies Press.

<sup>41</sup> Benson, et al (1998); Masten & Coatsworth (1998).

<sup>42</sup> Grossman & Tierney (1998)

<sup>43</sup> Deschenes, S., and Malone, H.J. (2011). *Year-Round Learning: Linking School, Afterschool, and Summer Learning to Support Student Success*. Harvard Family Research Project: Harvard Graduate School of Education.

youth development must be made at the organizational (executive) level, not just at the program level. Youth development is exactly what its name describes—about development, so for it to flourish it needs to be supported by a culture that values development and learning. Creating that kind of culture requires policies and practices at the organizational level that are infused with youth development values.



## II. B. CHANGING THE ODDS FOR KIDS

### What Capacity Do Selected Basic Services in the Six Good Neighborhoods Provide for Young People and Their Families?

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*Center for Youth and Communities  
The Heller School for Social Policy and Management, Brandeis University*

#### INTRODUCTION

A key element of The Skillman Foundation’s Good Neighborhoods and Good Schools theory of change was articulated as follows: “young people are more likely to be safe, healthy, well educated and prepared for adulthood when they are embedded in a strong system of support and opportunities [SOSO].” To assess progress toward the Readiness Phase indicators and preparedness for meeting the 2016 Goals, The Skillman Foundation sought a baseline of the basic services—free tax preparation, high need food resources, and health clinics— in systems of supports and opportunities that exist for the families of young people in the six Good Neighborhoods. Understanding what is available is the first step in determining what gaps and challenges exist and what could be done to improve them. To that end, the Brandeis team interviewed staff in agencies offering these three types of basic services in the six Good Neighborhoods to inquire about program capacity and services, the eligibility requirements, accessibility and awareness. While it is not an exhaustive study of all basic services of these types, it is a step towards understanding what exists in the neighborhoods.

The basic services portion of the SOSO assessment was conducted from a modified version of the SOSO questionnaire, omitting questions such as those that that pertained to program quality and coordination and collaboration.

#### FREE TAX PREPARATION

Free tax preparation services offer families an important financial resource and financial return. Tax preparation is defined as free assistance (for those that meet income requirements) with local, state, and federal tax filing issues, including property taxes, earned income credits, home heating credits, child credits, and assistance resolving disputes with the Internal Revenue Services. Two agencies were identified in the Good Neighborhoods that provided free tax preparation support to residents:

1. Accounting Aid Society (AAS), the largest provider of tax services in Michigan.<sup>44</sup>
2. AARP, which provides tax preparation services out of the Brightmoor Community Center.

AAS offers tax preparation in North End, Brightmoor, Osborn, and Southwest, and served 1,523 families (3,748 individuals) in all six Good Neighborhoods in 2009. AAS services were free for those who met income requirements (individuals must earn less than \$25,000 annually, and families of three people or fewer must have a household income of \$50,000 or less. During January and February 2010, 823 children’s families from these same neighborhoods were served. While AAS did not provide

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<sup>44</sup> As a current Skillman Foundation grantee, AAS’s data systems were already organized to provide data on its services for each of the Good Neighborhoods, so it provided detailed program data. Brightmoor Community Center could not provide data on its services for the Good Neighborhoods at this time because AARP runs the program.

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transportation to tax preparation sites, centers are located services at public institutions, including libraries and community centers, chosen based on their “accessibility to public transportation.” Participants made appointments in advance, from 30 minutes to 2 hours, depending on the complexity of an individual’s filing. Table 1, provided by AAS, shows the number of people who participated in AAS programs by neighborhood and the total number of dollars returned to residents in each neighborhood through the support of AAS tax preparation services.

**TABLE 1  
DOLLARS RETURNED TO GOOD NEIGHBORHOOD RESIDENTS  
THROUGH AAS TAX PREPARATION SERVICES IN 2009**

<b>2009</b>	<b>Number of people served</b>	<b>Dollars returned to neighborhood</b>
Cody/ Rouge	427	\$465,152
Osborn	1080	\$1,045,268
Southwest	1308	\$872,885
Chadsey/ Condon	349	\$406, 973
Northend	387	\$254,766
Brightmoor	197	\$216,256
<b>Total</b>	<b>3,748</b>	<b>\$3,261,300</b>

AARP provided tax preparation to senior citizens in partnership with the Brightmoor Community Center. Tax preparation was offered once a week during the months of February and March. Brightmoor Community Center provided transportation to seniors and disabled individuals with poor mobility. As AARP runs the program, Brightmoor Community Center could not share cost for services.

### **HIGH NEED FOOD RESOURCES (HNFRS)**

HNFRs are defined as organizations that have programs that deliver non-perishable foods or prepared items to cover at least one meal for an individual. Fifty-two HNFRs were identified in the Good Neighborhoods through web research, ground-level interviews, and collaboration with the University of Michigan. All 52 were contacted at least five times by phone; 18 were successfully interviewed.

**TABLE 2  
HIGH NEED FOOD RESOURCES BY NEIGHBORHOOD**

<b>Neighborhood</b>	<b>Number of HFNRs</b>	<b>HFNRs Interviewed</b>
Brightmoor	8	2
Chadsey/Condon	6	0
Cody/Rouge	13	7
North End	6	0
Osborn	6	2
Southwest	13	7
<b>Total</b>	<b>52</b>	<b>18</b>

**Program capacity and services.** Most programs reported serving individuals until their food supply was exhausted. While most did not have or share capacity information, four programs estimated serving 30-200 individuals, while two reported serving 40-100 individuals. Most HNFR’s limited their assistance to

food resources only.<sup>45</sup> Of the 18 interviewed, four HFNRs offered full meal services, twelve offered food pantry resources, and two offered food and clothing donations. Food programs were sometimes connected to after-school programming for youth. In limited cases, family development programs and after-school tutoring were used as informal outreach for food pantry and meal service programs. The programs may not have adequate staff or other resources to offer comprehensive informational services.

**Eligibility requirements.** Some programs limited eligibility by zip code, race, religion, or age. Several programs required IDs in order to receive food assistance, to meet both age and geography stipulations. Three food pantries would not serve food resources to any youth, while one program would not serve individuals younger than 19. Programs may have had more than one restriction.

**TABLE 3  
HIGH NEED FOOD RESOURCES ELIGIBILITY RESTRICTIONS**

Restriction	HNFR Programs Interviewed
Religion	2
Income	2
Geography	4
Age	2
Did not report	11

**Accessibility.** Many programs have limited hours of accessibility. Full meal services were provided during limited, mealtime hours while food pantry programs were open for several hours of service, often during the daytime, and usually required ID to receive food. The majority of centers were open from the morning until the early afternoon; few were available on weekends. One offered 24-hour services. One program had a delivery service for disabled individuals, where church members delivered food resources to individuals' homes.

**Awareness.** Information about HFNRs is hard to obtain. Many HFNRs are housed in small facilities (usually churches) with sparse staff. Recipients likely learn of services through word of mouth or attendance at church services. Many churches have limited contact information and general information, creating a barrier to service reception. Of the organizations with food pantries, eight had both a website and telephone number, seven had telephone numbers only, and three listed no contact information (information was discovered through web research and ground contacts).

## HEALTH CLINICS

This study examined the characteristics and accessibility of community health clinics in the Good Neighborhoods. The analysis focused on outpatient primary care services provided at no or reduced cost to low-income and uninsured individuals. For-profit hospitals in the area were not included in this analysis. Eight agencies with 10 health clinic locations were identified and interviewed.<sup>46</sup> See Table 4 for detailed list of services.

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<sup>45</sup> Some information may be based on out of data websites and interviewer estimates.

<sup>46</sup> Of the ten clinics, four were Federally Qualified Health Centers (FQHCs) that operated in Southwest, North End, and Osborn. FQHCs qualify for enhanced reimbursement from Medicare and Medicaid, and must serve an "underserved" area or population, offer a sliding fee scale, provide comprehensive services, have an ongoing quality assurance program, and have a governing board of directors. Two agencies located outside of the six neighborhoods were included in the analysis because residents in the Good Neighborhoods utilized their services.



**Program capacity and services.** The 10 clinics offered primary care services for an average 330 patients per day.

**Eligibility restrictions.** Care was available for both insured and uninsured patients. Some restricted patients by age: 6 out of the 10 clinics served all ages. Of the remaining four, one served up to age 18, one served ages 18-64, and two served individuals up to age 60.

**Accessibility.** Accessibility may be a challenge, given the costs to patients, limited transportation, the need to make an appointment, and limited evening and weekend office hours.

- **Hours:** 7 out of 10 locations were open during standard business hours, 9 AM-5 PM, Monday through Friday. Four clinics offered evening hours during the week, on Tuesday, Wednesday, and Thursday. Three were open on Saturdays. These extended hours permit families working 9 AM-5 PM to take their children or themselves to the doctor outside of work hours. No clinic was open on Sundays.
- **Appointments:** 8 out of 10 clinics required appointments. Walk-ins were accepted, though walk-in patients were subject to a waiting period or possibly not being seen due to a tight clinic schedule. Two staff members from the FQHCs said that there was no waiting list; instead there was an appointment waiting time averaging one week.
- **Transportation:** 2 out of 10 locations provided informal transportation on a case by case basis to and from the clinic. This is facilitated through partnerships with taxi companies or bus vouchers.
- **Cost:** 4 of the 8 agencies charged patients some co-pay regardless of their income, with fees ranging from \$20 to \$50 per visit. For the other four agencies, fees depended on the patient's income. All agencies, except one, offered a sliding pay scale.

Table 4, Key Characteristics of Health Centers, identifies hours and days of operations and locations of health centers, whether transportation is provided, eligibility requirements, average number of patients seen per day, and availability of a sliding fee scale.

**TABLE 4  
KEY CHARACTERISTICS OF HEALTH CENTERS**

Name/ Indicator	(CHASS) Community Health & Social Services	Detroit Community Health Connection	American Indian Health and Social Services	Advantage Family Health Services	Cabrini Clinic	Covenant Community Care	City of Detroit Dept. of Health and Wellness Promotion	Joy Southfield Community Development Corp. ( Michigan Children’s Hospital)
<b>Federally Qualified Health Center</b>	✓	✓		✓		✓		
<b>Ages Served</b>	Birth to 60	All ages	All ages	All ages	18-64	All ages	All ages	Birth to 18
<b>Open Mon.-Friday</b>	9-5 PM	9-5 PM	9-5 PM	9-5 PM Wed. 11-7 PM	9-5 PM Tues. and Thurs.	9-5 PM Tues./Wed/ Thur. until 8 PM	9-5 PM Wed. until 6:30 PM	Mon. only 9-3 PM
<b>Open Saturday</b>			✓	✓		✓		
<b>Transportation*</b>		✓	✓					
<b>Income Dependent</b>	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	FREE
<b>Sliding Scale</b>	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
<b>Average Patients Per Day</b>	16	50	75	50	30	60	N/A	50
<b>Brightmoor</b>								
<b>Chadsey/Condon</b>			✓					
<b>Cody/Rouge</b>								✓
<b>North End</b>	✓							
<b>Osborn</b>				✓			✓	
<b>Southwest</b>	✓					✓	✓	
<b>Located outside of the Good Neighborhoods</b>		✓ zip code 48215			✓ zip code 48226			

\*Not direct service; provided by taxis and public transportation vouchers

## RECOMMENDATIONS

The following recommendations are based on the findings of the basic services component of the SOSO assessment.

### High-Need Food Resources

- ▶ Conduct research to learn more about the match between what food resources are available and what is needed by residents. A better understanding of the accessibility of services (days/times as well as locations) and quality/quantity of food is needed.
- ▶ Support stronger data systems to track use of high need food resources in order to identify gaps and advocate for needed services. As most programs identified provided only food services, it is important to identify other key basic services that could be provided during the same visit.

### Tax Preparation

- ▶ Expand the focus of tax support to include financial literacy. The Foundation could support partnerships between free tax services and comprehensive financial literacy programs. For example, a local bank or asset building organization partner could promote their services at the same time clients complete their taxes in AAS and AARP locations.
- ▶ Promote AAS's method for tracking data using zip codes as an example of gauging the accessibility of their services. AAS sets a good example for how to collect data to assess accessibility on a broad scale.

### Health Centers

- ▶ Conduct research to learn more about the match between health care services and the needs of residents. While all clinics provide a sliding scale or free care, several extend hours in the evening and weekends, and two provide transportation, ongoing efforts to assess whether services are accessible is critical.
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### III. A. BUILDING NEIGHBORHOOD CAPACITIES TO SUPPORT YOUTH AND FAMILIES IN THE GOOD NEIGHBORHOODS AND GOOD SCHOOLS INITIATIVE

#### EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

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*Center for Youth and Communities  
The Heller School for Social Policy and Management, Brandeis University  
with J.F.M. Associates, Detroit MI*

In 2006, the Skillman Foundation embarked on Good Neighborhoods, a 10-year, \$100 million commitment to ensure that young people living in six Detroit neighborhoods are safe, healthy, well-educated, and prepared for adulthood. The initiative expanded in 2008 to embrace the Foundation's long-term commitment to quality education; hence it became the Good Neighborhoods and Good Schools Initiative (GN/GS). After years of grant making that had produced some benefits for individual children, but no lasting change in their conditions, the Foundation shifted its focus to seek deeper and more sustained results that would "change the odds for kids."

The Foundation's new approach involves a range of neighborhood, school, and system change strategies, in concert with various public and private partners, residents, and other stakeholders, to improve outcomes for youth. The six neighborhoods – Brightmoor, Chadsey Condon, Cody Rouge, Northend Central Woodward, Osborn, and Southwest – were selected because of their high concentration of children and youth, their low income status, and the presence of assets that can be maximized to enhance the well being of children.

The Foundation engaged intermediaries, an evaluation and learning team, and other partners to enhance its attempts to achieve the goals in the six neighborhoods. After an initial planning phase, the work entered a "readiness" phase in which the Foundation, its many partners, and the neighborhoods prepared for implementation. This report by the evaluation team focuses on results and lessons learned in the area of neighborhood capacity building during the "readiness" phase, particularly in the areas of neighborhood governance and leadership development. It is based on prior evaluation and Foundation materials, recent research (including a survey, interviews, and focus groups with those most directly involved with the neighborhood capacity building efforts), and conversations with a variety of sources.

Believing that resident engagement and leadership are critical to sustained, large-scale change for children, GN/GS is anchored in a community partnership process.

A key goal of the 2008-2010 GN Readiness Phase was to organize the neighborhoods to develop **governance structures** and **resident and stakeholder leadership** capable of implementing a community-owned plan to improve child and youth outcomes. To accomplish this, the Foundation identified the National Community Development Institute (NCDI) and the University of Michigan School of Social Work Technical Assistance Center (UM TAC). It also engaged a third partner, Prevention Network, to administer the Community Connections Small Grants Program.

**NCDI's role** in the community engagement process grew out of their expertise in building capacity for social change in communities of color across the nation. Influenced by their theory of change, NCDI co-

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designed and led the early GN/GS community engagement work in partnership with the Foundation and its other core partners. During the GN planning phase, NCDI hired three full-time organizers who lived or had deep roots in Detroit. Initially, each worked with two GN neighborhoods, “conducting extensive community outreach and assisting with co-design and facilitation of the community planning meetings.”<sup>47</sup> In the second year, NCDI hired additional staff so that there was one organizer for each neighborhood and a Program Assistant. They changed the Community Organizer title to Community Liaison to facilitate bridge-building between the Foundation and neighborhood residents.

**UM TAC**<sup>48</sup> was created in 2005 to inform the GN change process and build community capacity to sustain change. UM TAC’s chief GN activities include (1) *research*, including such activities as assessing residents’ and other stakeholders’<sup>49</sup> goals, strategies, and priorities; resident perceptions of supports and opportunities; and the effects of specific interventions on community change; (2) *training and technical assistance*, including such activities as providing community based research opportunities for GN youth; providing technical assistance to the Foundation on best practices in community change initiatives, strategic thinking and planning,; increasing residents’ and other stakeholders’ capacity through events, workshops, training, coaching, and data presentations; facilitation of cross-neighborhood learning; and providing leadership training; and (3) *communication and dissemination*.

The Foundation also started the Community Connections Small Grants (CCSG) program<sup>50</sup> and selected **Prevention Network** (PN) in April 2006 to provide technical assistance, manage a Review Panel (with resident and stakeholder members), and oversee the grants process. Grants of up to \$5,000 were available to support grassroots resident leaders and small non-profits to develop and implement initiatives that address the neighborhoods’ self-identified needs. During the GN planning phase, PN managed the Learning Grants Program, which made small awards (up to \$1,500) to neighborhood nonprofits and unincorporated groups to assess community needs and assets.

#### *Community Engagement Process*

The Foundation and its partners began the community engagement process with a planning phase that was rolled out in two cohorts. Cohort 1 included Southwest (now two neighborhoods – Southwest Detroit Neighborhoods and Chadsey Condon), Osborn, and Brightmoor. Cohort 2 included Cody Rouge and Northend. Cohort 1 began between January-May 2006; Cohort 2 began in September 2007, benefiting from a refined process based on lessons learned from Cohort 1.

During the planning phase, each neighborhood followed a similar process, based on NCDI’s approach: community engagement meetings, stakeholder meetings, focus groups, and four to six community meetings to identify goals. In line with this plan, each neighborhood also established four to five Action Planning Teams (APTs). UM TAC helped the APTs develop short- and long-term goals and strategies as well as action steps for achieving them. They coached them about functioning effectively as a team, creating realistic and measurable goals, and implementing a project. Findings from the learning grants (e.g., the number of after-school programs or vacant lots in the neighborhood) informed the APTs’ work. Once the goals were established and implementation had begun, UM TAC helped the APTs create a unified community plan.

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<sup>47</sup> National Community Development Institute, Skillman Foundation Project Summary, 2006.

<sup>48</sup> This section adapted from [http://www.ssw.umich.edu/public/currentProjects/goodNeighborhoods/About\\_TAC.pdf](http://www.ssw.umich.edu/public/currentProjects/goodNeighborhoods/About_TAC.pdf)

<sup>49</sup> For the purposes of GN, Skillman defines “stakeholders” as representatives of key organizations, agencies, faith-based institutions in the neighborhood.

<sup>50</sup> The CCSG is described in more detail in “Engaging ‘Natural Leaders’ to Improve Neighborhoods for Youth: Evaluation Report on the Community Connections Grants Program.”

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### *Neighborhood Governance Process*

Efforts to develop community governance were guided by a multi-stage plan that included two large meetings in each neighborhood. The first was to “launch” the concept and the second was to share ideas – a beginning step toward developing formal resident/stakeholder partnerships.<sup>51</sup> The Foundation President and CEO and the Senior Program Officer for Neighborhoods presented the Skillman Values and Expectations to clarify the Foundation’s position — noting that the neighborhoods could make their own decisions, but the Foundation would only invest in plans that were in sync with its values and expectations.

Following the launch, invested residents and stakeholders met regularly to create governance entities to help each neighborhood to stay focused on its vision and develop and implement the community plan. Interim boards or steering committees wrote by-laws and policies for each governance board. The first round of elections in all six neighborhoods was completed by January 2010. In March 2010, the Foundation’s President and CEO and Senior Program Officer for Neighborhoods, along with NCDI and UM TAC representatives, met with each neighborhood’s newly elected board, asked if they wanted to continue to partner with the Foundation on GN, and asked that they affirm the 2016 Goals<sup>52</sup> and include them in their community plans. Further, they set out expectations (1) for selecting a “lead” agency to manage board administrative and financial functions and hire and supervise an Executive Director and administrative assistant who would staff the boards and (2) for receiving funding from the Foundation.

During the first year of operation, the Community Liaisons supported the governance boards and helped them develop a plan to transition to working with a lead agency. By early 2011, all six governance boards had selected a lead agency and had executive directors. As an indication of continuity, stability, and neighborhood appreciation for the Community Liaisons, four of the executive directors were former Community Liaisons.<sup>53</sup>

The following resident-stakeholder partnerships are now operational and continue to work with the Foundation.

- Brightmoor Alliance
- Cody Rouge Community Alliance
- Northend Central Woodward Organization
- Osborn Neighborhood Alliance
- Chadsey Condon Community Organization
- Southwest Detroit Neighborhoods Congress of Communities

The resident-stakeholder governance bodies have evolved in distinctive ways, but, despite many challenges, all have developed structures that (1) reflect a collective, community approach and (2) show potential to operate as planning and advocacy voices for the neighborhoods in their efforts to improve outcomes for children.

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<sup>51</sup>The first meeting was originally scheduled for early fall, but the Foundation, partners, and neighborhoods were not ready to proceed then. Time was needed to regroup, seek outside expertise, listen to the people involved in the neighborhood process, and generate a clear plan. Appendix C contains the NCDI “Listening Guide,” which provided a mechanism for the Community Liaisons to talk with residents and stakeholders who were involved in governance development while communicating a consistent message across groups and neighborhoods.

<sup>52</sup>In 2010, the Foundation convened the 2016 Task Force to articulate the goals desired by 2016.

<sup>53</sup>NCDI hired one of the other Liaisons for a different project; in the Northend, the decision was made to hire one executive director for both the GN board and a governance group associated with another community-based organization.

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### *Leadership Development*

Another important aspect of building neighborhood capacity was leadership development. Residents have participated in a number of leadership trainings. Highlighted here are NCDI's Leadership Academy and UM TAC offerings.

NCDI designed and led GN Leadership Academies, consisting of eight Saturday sessions, beginning in 2008. NCDI describes them as "a customized training program for people living and working in an identified Good Neighborhoods community ... designed to engage action team members and other natural leaders in a unique learning community where their own experiences are used to shape the core curriculum and they serve as peer educators with their neighbors."

For its part, UM TAC planned and led three to four skill-building workshops per Academy and provided individual coaching to help individuals further develop their leadership skills. UM TAC also custom designed other workshops to respond to needs identified by residents and stakeholders.

### **Readiness Phase Evaluation**

The Foundation and its partners developed the following questions to guide an assessment of neighborhood capacity during the GN readiness phase:

1. Is there a community plan directly connected to GN/GS long-term goals; vetted by residents, key neighborhood organizations and other stakeholders; and supported by outside organizations working in the neighborhoods?
2. Does nonprofit capacity exist to support implementing the community plan?
3. Does resident and stakeholder leadership exist to support implementing the community plan?
4. Do the neighborhoods have effective decision-making, management, and accountability structures?
5. Are an increasing number and representation of residents (including youth) involved in creating and sustaining the community plan?
6. Have networks and working relationships among cultural identity groups become stronger?

The evaluation included a survey,<sup>54</sup> interviews, and focus groups<sup>55</sup> conducted in early 2011, as well as reviews of written materials and evaluation team member observations. The evaluation team also collected stories about GN impacts on individuals.

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<sup>54</sup> The Brandeis team, Skillman, UM TAC, and PN's CCSG coordinator developed the Survey of Participation in Good Neighborhood Activities. UM TAC conducted the survey by telephone with Leadership Academy graduates; PN surveyed a sample of Small Grants recipients and Review Panel members; and key stakeholders in each neighborhood surveyed governance board members, mostly at board or committee meetings. The Brandeis team sought to obtain as many completed surveys as possible from among individuals who served on the governance boards, who had completed the Leadership Academy, and who had received small grants; 162 surveys were completed from February through April 2011.

<sup>55</sup> With input from Skillman, the Brandeis team developed interview and focus group questions (see Appendix H) addressing *neighborhood leadership capacity and the capacity and effectiveness of the governance boards* and to ensure alignment between evaluation objectives and data collection. The questions reflect the indicators in the Evaluation Framework. Interviews and/or focus groups were conducted with governance board members and Executive Directors, NCDI and UM TAC staff, and Skillman Program Officers.

### ***Summary of Findings***

The findings, together with previous efforts to assess progress toward readiness, paint a picture of progress in each neighborhood. In spite of the many challenges, much has been achieved. High on the list of achievements are the following:

- Emergent leadership and neighborhood governance structures are in place.
- Residents and stakeholders who are involved with the GN process are highly engaged.
- NCDI and UM TAC continue their critical and solid support to the governance boards to help them achieve their collective goals. Residents and stakeholders place a high value on the technical assistance and support they've received.
- The Small Grants Program and process were widely praised.
- New partnerships and alliances among nonprofits and businesses have emerged within each of the neighborhoods.
- Collaboration, communication, and alignment between and among Skillman, the intermediaries, and other key partners have improved significantly.
- There is broad agreement on the need for systematic ways to assess progress and share outcomes.

### ***Summary of Lessons Learned***

The Readiness Phase was replete with lessons learned by everyone with whom we talked. A few of the key themes follow.

- Sustained and substantial technical assistance to boards concerning board development is needed and effective.
  - A formal strategic outreach and communication plan is essential to ensure broad neighborhood participation at all levels.
  - Creating a mechanism for regular, sustained sharing of successful outcomes across neighborhoods could leverage gains.
  - The small grants process can be a platform to demonstrate visible results in a short period of time, which could inspire ongoing participation. Small grants review panels can serve as an “integrative vehicle” for neighborhood strategic planning and change.
  - Community change is an organic process with its own neighborhood-specific timetable.
  - Implementing intermediaries need to align their work with each other and with the Foundation early in the planning stage.
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## Summary of Recommendations

Survey, interview, and focus group respondents' recommendations for next steps for the neighborhoods and needed supports show insight, thoughtfulness, and an understanding of GN/GS goals. The following recommendations for the Foundation and key partners build on this research as well as team observations and earlier findings.

### 1. Alignment and Collaboration

Intentional alignment and collaboration among neighborhood operating entities and leadership capacity builders would greatly enhance impact.

#### **a. Align Neighborhood Leadership Development Opportunities**

While collaboration has improved, leadership development is still not optimally aligned, organized, and operating at scale. Develop an overarching plan for increasing neighborhood leadership capacity that involves all key capacity builders. GN/GS sustainability is directly linked to the breadth and depth of neighborhood leadership capacity.

#### **b. Align Governance Boards and the Small Grants Program Where Feasible**

Develop a mechanism for more formal interaction for better coordination and planning in achieving the community plan goals and the GN/GS 2016 Goals.

### 2. Governance Boards

The governance boards have made important strides and yet are very new. Continuous attention at a pace they can tolerate will be critical to help their maturation and opportunity to become sustainable.

- a. Continue to strengthen and support governance boards and other neighborhood leaders with more, and *ongoing*, training and technical assistance to address identified challenges.
- b. Create a cross-neighborhood peer learning structure so governance board members can learn from each other.
- c. Work with the boards to determine priority areas for capacity building and neighborhood improvement and develop funding plans accordingly (to include both Skillman and other funds).

### 3. Community Connections Small Grants Program

Continue the CCSG program and improve it through increased oversight and monitoring, allowing grant funds to be used for overhead and promotional costs, and providing more grant management training.

The six neighborhoods have faced common challenges; each has faced its own distinctive challenges as well. The results so far are promising, but the governance boards are new and untested in many ways. It might be safe to say that all the neighborhoods are poised for Implementation, but at the end of 2010 not all are completely "ready." While the building blocks seem to be in place, further and serious attention and support are needed to address the challenges and complete the transfer of leadership to the neighborhood organizations. Continued assistance and monitoring are needed, along with feedback to support course corrections to ensure continued progress. Moreover, just as assets and challenges differ by neighborhood, the pace of progress is, and will continue to be, different for each.

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### **III. B. ENGAGING “NATURAL LEADERS” TO IMPROVE NEIGHBORHOODS FOR YOUTH**

Evaluation Report on the Community Connections Grants Program within the Skillman Foundation’s Detroit Community Change Strategy, 2006-2010

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#### **EXECUTIVE SUMMARY**

*Touchstone Center for Collaborative Inquiry*

The Community Connections Grants Program is a strategy of the Skillman Foundation to leverage residents and other “natural leaders” and “natural helpers” as resources for change in its six target neighborhoods, so that children can grow up safe, healthy, educated and prepared for adulthood. Participating neighborhoods include Brightmoor and Cody Rouge on the far west side of Detroit, Chadsey/Condon and Vernor in southwest Detroit, the Northend/ Central neighborhood, and Osborn on the far northeast side.

Also known as the small grants program, Community Connections awards grants of up to \$5,000 to local groups, both incorporated and unincorporated, to “provide support for innovative grassroots efforts to impact community change in neighborhoods.” The program is intended to “respond quickly to community needs, build resident leadership and empower residents and small nonprofits to help implement programs that will support their community goal.”<sup>56</sup> From July 2006 through December 2010, Community Connections has provided 412 grants, totaling nearly \$1.5 million, to 291 mostly small and local organizations in the six neighborhoods.

#### **Program operations**

The program is administered by Prevention Network (PN) in partnership with Skillman Foundation staff. In keeping with the program’s goal of building resident leadership and Skillman’s interest in fostering local ownership of neighborhood change efforts, a grant review panel made up of residents plays a major role in operating Community Connections. This panel is currently comprised of 21 residents of the six neighborhoods. Panelists are selected by PN with input from the Foundation, the neighborhood governance councils and executive directors, and current panelists. They are diverse in age, gender, neighborhood of residence, ethnicity, and length of service. The panel meets monthly to review all grant applications and make funding recommendations. Panelists contribute about eight hours per month in this role. They also serve as ambassadors and connectors among the small grants program and other residents, institutions and change efforts in their neighborhoods.

A Prevention Network consultant coordinates the Community Connections program. She plays a key role: she circulates in the neighborhoods scouting for natural leaders and helpers that might want to tap small grant resources; provides coaching and mentoring to grant seekers, grantees and panelists; and staffs panel meetings. She helps connect grantee leaders and panelists to other opportunities to apply and further develop their leadership skills, to access resources and build organizational capacity. She organizes networking events, participates in meetings of the Good Neighborhoods core partners,

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<sup>56</sup> From Skillman website, “Small grants,” <http://www.skillman.org/grants/small-grants>, 2/28/11.

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and circulates among neighborhood stakeholders. Other PN staff, volunteers, Foundation staff, and the six neighborhood executive directors also play supportive, connecting roles.

Grants awarded average \$50,000 to \$75,000 per year in each of the six neighborhoods. The average grant size was \$3,251 in 2009-10. Groups can receive up to two grants per year, but of the 291 grantees to date, only about one fourth had been funded more than once (and fewer than one in 10 had received more than two grants).

About a third of small grant projects were led by residents in partnership with agencies, schools or faith-based institutions; another third were led by nonprofit organizations (mostly small local ones that included resident leadership); and about one sixth were led by residents alone, with the remainder led primarily by schools or faith-based organizations.

Almost three fourths of projects fell into five categories of activity: sports and fitness, neighborhood events, academic-focused programs, arts and summer camps. Over two thirds of projects said they pursued multiple purposes. For their primary purpose, about half focused either on “mentoring/tutoring/youth programs” or “youth development/leadership.” Another third focused on “arts and culture,” “community interaction” or “skills for career development.”

Projects located their activities in various settings within their neighborhoods: most commonly, over a third of the projects analyzed held some activities outdoors while over one fourth held activities at schools and at churches and about one in five held activities at community centers.

### **Variations among neighborhoods**

Neighborhoods vary somewhat in the types of projects that are happening, the age groups of children and youth being engaged, the kinds of local assets being leveraged in these grassroots projects, and the level of small grants activity. For example:

- In 2009 and 2010 in Northend/ Central there were 10 academic focused projects while there were none with this focus in Vernor. Vernor grantees initiated 11 projects in the sports and fitness category, while Chadsey/Condon had only three in that category.
  - Cody Rouge had fewer projects involving elementary school children while Chadsey/Condon, Northend/Central and Vernor had the most. Vernor also had the most projects involving pre-school age children.
  - Over half the projects analyzed in Vernor held activities outdoors, while only one fifth of those in Osborn did. In contrast, nearly half of Osborn’s projects held activities at neighborhood centers while less than one in seven of Vernor’s projects did. Schools were used as project sites by two fifths of the projects in Brightmoor and Chadsey/Condon, but by only one of 13 Cody Rouge projects analyzed. Over a third of Chadsey/Condon’s projects located some activities at churches, while only one in 15 Vernor projects analyzed did.
  - The total dollar amount of small grants awarded in Vernor declined each year from 2006-07 through 2009-10, while the amount awarded to projects in Northend/Central increased each year from 2007-08 through 2009-10. The other four neighborhoods had a mixture of year-to-year increases and decreases in total grant awards.
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## Results

Children and youth in these six neighborhoods have more access to enrichment activities thanks to the Community Connections program, with about 15 projects per neighborhood funded each year.

Grantees reported a median number of 19 youth involved per project, meaning about 1,800 youth are participating annually in these projects across the six neighborhoods. In gender, ethnicity and age, these participants roughly mirror the demographics of these neighborhoods.

Through these projects, participating youth are gaining expanded learning opportunities, new contexts for skill development and identity formation, and expanded relationships both between youth and adults and between children and youth of different ages. Some projects engaged young people in designing the project and writing the proposal, thereby cultivating creative leadership, planning, communications skills, and ownership.

Participating adults – those leading funded projects, and those serving on the residents review panel – appear to be growing in skills, knowledge, vision and networks as well. Grantees reported a median number of nine adults involved in each project. Adults across the age spectrum are engaging in these projects, with reported participants including roughly equal numbers of college aged, young parents, middle aged and older adults.

Contributing factors to adults' development through Community Connections include the learning experience that comes with project leadership, review panel service, coaching and mentoring by the Community Connections coordinator and the six neighborhood executive directors, participation in the Good Neighborhoods Leadership Academy, and engagement in other leadership venues.

Community Connections grassroots leaders are prominent in other leadership venues within the Skillman change strategy, especially the six neighborhoods' governance boards. Each governance board includes three to seven small grantees, and five of six boards include a resident review panelist or a panelist's family member. About 10% of all small grantees (28 in total) and more than a third of resident review panelists serve on or are closely involved in neighborhood governance boards. Five of the six boards had officers that were small grantees or panelists, including the president or chairperson in four neighborhoods.

About one third of the people completing the Good Neighborhoods Leadership Academy in its first four rounds were Community Connections grantees or panelists. About 10% of all Community Connections grantees have sent people to the Leadership Academy.

Most of the 291 Community Connections grantees through 2010 have had limited engagement, receiving only one grant. However, about a dozen per neighborhood (75 in all) have received two or more grants, including about four per neighborhood that have been funded three times or more. The small grants and affiliated opportunities appear to be facilitating new and stronger partnerships, both among these small local organizations, and between small groups and larger agencies and schools. Most projects are collaborative, involving a median number of three organizations. In several cases, small grants helped grassroots groups build capacity and lay groundwork for larger grants and projects. Several small grantees have taken advantage of other developmental resources linked to the Skillman change effort. For example, over half of the organizations to go through the Youth Development Commission's Targeted Area Partnership Program have been Community Connections grantees.

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The Community Connections program appears to be influencing dynamics among larger agencies (and to a lesser extent schools) and residents and small local organizations in these six neighborhoods: mutual respect, trust and collaboration appear to be increasing. Several interviewees noted a shift in attitudes among both residents and agency staff. As one said,

Small grants provided the opportunity for [institutional] stakeholders to say, 'Yes, I do not live here but I care about the neighborhood and I'll work with you on the small grant.' Little groups learned that the large organizations were not going to take all the money or take credit for the work. Relationships were built...Skillman was influencing organizations to work with residents. It had to be resident driven. The small grants clarified those roles. The small grants were the equalizer...Organizations have begun to rethink how they do business, to honor resident voice and that to get money they have to have partnerships.

These shifts appear to be the result of several factors: the empowering experience for residents of receiving and implementing a small grant; the mentorship of residents by the Community Connections coordinator and the neighborhood executive directors who encouraged them to value their own expertise and authority and to view agency and school professionals as peers; the learning that institutional staff and residents experienced as they formed relationships and began working together; and Skillman's insistence to agencies and schools that they engage residents as partners.

Small grant project events and activities are expanding the number of spaces where people can meet neighbors and begin to engage in collective efforts that improve the neighborhood. These spaces for interaction and shared work help connect people to the place where they live, help them see themselves and their neighbors as a vital neighborhood, and help strengthen the habits, skills and networks by which they can work for community improvements rather than retreating or leaving.

## Lessons

Three basic design factors appear to contribute to the successes of the Community Connections program:

- It is woven into Good Neighborhoods and the larger Skillman community change effort, rather than a stand-alone strategy;
- Its emphasis on "resident-driven" processes strengthens the sense of local decision-making and ownership;
- The organizing role played by the program coordinator and the neighborhood executive directors has been vital for nurturing resident leaders and connecting them into broader institutional and policy networks.

Challenges making progress difficult include:

- **Seeing the whole and working for change:** Even though some networking and integration occurs, few people have an overview of the patterns of activity, concern and leadership that Community Connections is weaving through these neighborhoods – nor of how Community Connections can dovetail with other Skillman change components for greatest impact. Neither the small grants application form, nor the review panel process, has given much attention to the bigger-picture goals of resident leadership, empowerment and collaborating for change.
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Attention disproportionately has focused on individual grants and project implementation concerns.

- **Questions regarding organizational capacity growth:** Sustaining and strengthening these small organizations is a long-term and difficult process. Most remain fragile. There has also been ambiguity about what kinds of organizational capacity growth are important. To date, much developmental assistance has focused on increasing program and management capacities – even though Skillman is clear that it’s not trying to create 50 large service agencies in each neighborhood. There has been less attention to building capacity for innovation and collaboration, for civic engagement and systemic change – and perhaps less clarity about how to do this.
- **Expanding youth leadership and public engagement:** Most funded projects to date have given primary attention to helping children be safe, healthy, and educated (in an academic sense). Less attention has gone to preparing children for an adulthood in which they can be active citizens, proactive community leaders and skillful change agents. The challenge is to help children and youth connect their talents, ideas and knowledge to their community, so that they can form the skills, relationships and the mindset that will enable them to contribute to community improvement today and into the future.

## Recommendations

In light of these challenges, and strengths, the following recommendations for improving the Community Connections grants program are offered:

- **Refine program guidelines and materials** to improve the focus on underlying change goals and to increase synergy and momentum. This might include:
    - Increase emphasis on projects that include collaboration among organizations.
    - Encourage grantees and panelists to become more intentional about developing leadership and empowering residents, including engaging youth as active contributors to community improvement.
    - Refine brochures, website, application forms and other communications materials to increase attention to youth organizing and engagement and to community organizing and systems change. Expand coaching and capacity building assistance in these key areas.
    - Clarify guidelines for previously-funded groups to encourage continuity in programs while also expecting experienced grantees to learn and improve.
    - Be more flexible in allowing local grantees to work with children who live outside of these six neighborhoods. Particularly since schools mix children across neighborhood lines, Community Connections should leverage relationship networks without excessively-rigid geographical restrictions.
  - **Leverage more fully the review panel’s leadership potential:** expanding the vision to reach beyond applications review to become a strategic learning, linking and leadership vehicle for Community Connections. This might include:
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- Share grantees' final reports with panelists so that they can learn about grantees' activities, results and lessons.
  - Periodically compile and analyze patterns of activity, participation, results and lessons from grantees, and create spaces where the panel (and other stakeholders) can reflect on these findings and develop ideas for increasing impact.
  - Improve linkages between the panel and the neighborhood governance boards. Make sure panelists and board members have opportunities to be in dialogue and to learn together.
  - Make more explicit panelists' roles as community connectors, ambassadors and strategists for the program and its larger change goals. Recruit, orient and mentor panelists with this strategic purpose in mind.
  - Invite the panel to revise its current processes as necessary to open space for these larger strategic roles. Perhaps panel "alumni" can be engaged to help perform some of these functions.
- **Improve use of the program's growing knowledge base:** enhancing its systems for ongoing learning and utilization of emerging lessons. Steps might include:
    - Systematically review grantees' reports, declined applications and other data on program activities, engagement, and contextual factors, to generate clues for greater effectiveness.
    - Involve staff, panelists, grantees and other stakeholders in periodic reflection on results and other patterns to stimulate learning and shared understanding.
    - Expand spaces where grantees and others can form relationships for peer learning, mutual assistance and joint action.
- **Expand visibility of small grants activities and results** both among neighborhood residents and among other stakeholders and policy makers.
    - Encourage more photography, video documentation and storytelling regarding Community Connections work – and display these publicly in diverse venues.
    - Encourage more events where youth can perform, demonstrate their gifts and make visible contributions to neighborhood quality of life.
    - Increase communications about Community Connections groups, leaders, projects and lessons to other stakeholders and institutional participants in Skillman's community change efforts.
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# III. C. ASSESSMENT OF CAPACITY BUILDING EFFORTS OF THE SKILLMAN FOUNDATION 2008-2010

## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

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### **Purpose and Context of Assessment**

As part of the evaluation of the Readiness Phase of the Skillman Foundation's Good Neighborhoods and Good Schools (GN/GS) initiative, the Wayne State University's Center for Social Work Practice and Policy Research conducted an assessment of the Foundation's organizational capacity building efforts. The Foundation supported two main strategies: 1) investment in four partner organizations/intermediaries that provided organizational capacity-building assistance to community-based nonprofits; and 2) assistance to four potential "anchor" organizations in Brightmoor, one of the six GN/GS target neighborhoods. This summary describes each of the Foundation's two main strategies, assesses the results, and offers some recommendations for organizational capacity building based on these results.

### **Methods and Limitations**

The research team used several methods to document the process, outputs, and perceived impacts of the two key strategies. First, the study team conducted structured interviews with the Program Officer of the Skillman Foundation, the directors/managers of each intermediary and the executive directors of the Brightmoor organizations for a total of eight one to two-hour, face-to-face interviews. For analysis, all of the interviews were audio-recorded and transcribed. Existing materials and documents were also reviewed for content related to program effort. Finally, the research team developed a comprehensive database to document the activities conducted by the intermediaries in each of the six GN/GS target neighborhoods from 2008-2010. The researchers organized and cleaned each data set and merged them into one data file for analysis.

The study's approach was limited by several factors. As a retrospective (post-hoc) study, it could not draw upon baseline data against which to assess progress, nor was it able to determine whether the effort occurred as planned. Resource constraints limited the inquiry to a single perspective on how each intermediary sought to build the capacity of community groups and with what perceived impact. Developing the database was challenging because each intermediary had its own database structure and methods for recording organizational participation in the capacity building activities. Attendance data reported an individual's attendance but not the duration or extent of this participation. Finally, a small number of the participating organizations served multiple neighborhoods, leading to duplicate counts and affecting the totals reported for number of participants, organizations served, and dollars invested.

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## Key Findings

### Strategy #1: Training and Technical Assistance from Four Intermediaries

During the Readiness Phase, the Foundation invested resources in four intermediaries as a strategy to build the capacity of individual organizations to play a vital role in reaching the goals of the GN/GS initiative. The Foundation:

- Supported the set-up of the **University of Michigan Technical Assistance Center** to provide technical assistance on: 1) content to the Foundation; 2) skill building to small- and medium-sized organizations; and 3) assistance to other partners on community engagement.
- Provided supplemental funds for **New Detroit's** implementation of the Compassion Capital Initiative, which focused on building the infrastructure of small- to medium-sized organizations through workshops and sub-awards for technical assistance.
- Supported the **Youth Development Commission** with operating funds to target capacity building in the GN/GS neighborhoods by hosting events and workshops, and providing technical assistance and mini-grants to small organizations.
- Supported **Prevention Network** to provide technical assistance and fund small- to medium-sized organizations programming efforts.

A total of 4,395 individuals and 703 organizations participated in 348 different workshops, webinars and events sponsored by the intermediaries over the three-year period. Each GN/GS neighborhood benefitted from an investment ranging from \$237,373 to \$385,482 by the intermediaries. The use of these dollars varied by the source, as some funds were dedicated to capacity building, while others were given for programming purposes. In total over \$1.5 million in funding was provided to over 500 neighborhood organizations.

Each of the intermediary organizations had its own goals, approach, and tradition of working with community-based organizations; and each of the six GN/GS neighborhoods had its own organizational needs and assets. So the impacts from the work ranged from creating new small organizations to building the infrastructure of existing organizations or creating more services for youth.

The research team concluded that each of the four intermediaries utilized best practice strategies for capacity building, and that funding four different intermediaries capitalized on the strengths that each entity brought to the work. Educational workshops and skill training for service providers are fundamental elements that increase awareness of ways to improve organizational functioning such as board development and offers new techniques for operating small nonprofits. Technical assistance helps individuals set these new practices in motion and deal with local context of providing services in the neighborhood. Providers vary in the use of staff versus paid consultants, and each model offers benefits (stability of relationship) and drawbacks (lack of specialized skills). Each intermediary provided some individualized coaching, either through staff or consultants, but none provide sustained follow-up for its capacity building activities or had a multistage program to allow for different skill levels of organizations.

Data from a variety of sources indicate generally positive feedback from participants, highlighting the quality of the assistance, the skill of the consultants and the concrete benefits to their organizations. The research team found many examples of organizational impact such as formalizing policies and procedures, polishing marketing materials, improving program design, strengthening board processes, and garnering new outside resources.

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The research team also identified two potential critiques of the approach. First, the absence of a planned strategy to coordinate efforts across intermediaries may signify a missed opportunity for maximizing resources. The four groups did not engage in joint planning, which meant that training options were redundant, technical assistance was provided in a silo and funding for programs or consultants was uncoordinated. Capacity building appeared as a smorgasbord of options with many entry points for organizations to learn and build their organizational capacity.

A second potential critique notes that training assistance did not appear to be tied to receipt of funding. Some funding was provided specifically for capacity building, but a portion of dollars provided resources for program staff and materials. It is unclear as to whether these dollars expanded capacity in the way the Foundation intended. More programming may be provided, but without a baseline assessment of program and financial capacity, it is impossible to know whether these groups can sustain the programs. Technical assistance and training participants may be receiving the skills necessary for organizational development, and sustainability, but the research team was unable to assess whether they are acting on their knowledge gains and able to provide higher quality programs.

Foundation staff reflecting on the results of this capacity building strategy identified three additional positive outcomes of the work. It:

- Established neighborhood identity and a sense of belonging to a larger movement devoted to making things better for children.
- Increased individual (e.g., volunteers) and organizational (e.g., board members) capacity, including standards for organizational performance.
- Facilitated the use of quality standards for youth development, expanding the idea of what range of supports are needed to serve children.

Overall, the range and depth of capacity building work reflects the Foundation's deep appreciation of the role of grassroots organizations and the safety net that they provide in neighborhoods that have been undeveloped and under-resourced in their efforts to meet the needs of children and families. The research team notes that one of the important needs that served through this approach was to support community-based organizations as a way to create inclusive processes for neighborhood change. If the organizations were able to act on their missions through small grant awards and take steps to build their infrastructure, they would in turn be able to deliver services for children and families in the neighborhood. Moreover, this strategy served as a vehicle for action during the planning and readiness stage. Community residents and other stakeholders often get frustrated with planning efforts, and want to move more quickly into implementing solutions. Having training programs and available funding for community engagement through the intermediaries produced multiple benefits that would carry over to support the goals of the GN/GS initiative.

#### Strategy #2: Targeted Support to Brightmoor Organizations

The second strategy of the Foundation targeted the Brightmoor neighborhood to receive additional support to promote the readiness of four groups to become "anchor organizations" with the expertise, financial and leadership capacity to advance the neighborhood's agenda for children. The Foundation awarded \$50,000 to Brightmoor Alliance, City Mission Detroit, Brightmoor Community Center and Northwest Detroit Neighborhood Development. All of these organizations participated in the early stages of the GN/GS and had the potential to become partners with the Foundation in the work of neighborhood change. As part of the Foundation's expectation, these organizations were required to participate in the New Detroit's capacity building program.

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The results from the interviews confirm that the resources were used for operational expenses, which freed up executive staff time to participate in the capacity building program. All interviewees were able to identify tangible benefits and outcomes including modifying board practices and expanding board membership, establishing new policies and procedures, creating fund development materials, and developing budget processes and completing audits. The Brightmoor organizations appreciated the value of the New Detroit program; it was an opportunity to strengthen their organizational functioning and focus on the neighborhood services. From the Foundation's perspective, the effort produced mixed results. Participation in the New Detroit program was not consistent. The process did yield enough information for the Foundation to identify which organizations were ready for the transformation stage and which ones still needed to continue building capacity.

### **Implications for Working with Mid-Sized Groups**

How effective are the Foundation's capacity building models for working with midsized groups? Two areas of capacity building speak to investments that are critical for midsized organizations. First, strong board development is a continuous process and necessary for all sizes and types of organizations. The Foundation should be aware of the inertia in midsized groups to maintain the status quo of their processes. Small organizations function relatively well without Boards as they tend to perform all of the roles themselves. While this is not going to help grow the small organizations, midsized organizations with funding greater than \$750,000 need outside accountability through strong board governance, structure and responsibilities. Effective board governance is key for sustainability. Funders can play a critical role by emphasizing the importance of an active, ethical and accountable board and helping midsized groups achieve a well functioning Board.

The second key area for midsized groups involves the use of best practice services and the evaluation of quality programs for youth and families. Many operate traditional programs and are insulated from research and new innovative efforts in positive youth development. Best practice models should be promoted by the Foundation as a way to most effectively and efficiently use limited resources. This would require a special kind of capacity building and technical assistance to increase the ability of non-profits to integrate research into their daily practice. Regardless of the type of programming offered, as organizations grow in their development, evaluation design, planning and implementation should be required to demonstrate outcomes consistent with GN/GS governance body action plans. Evaluation capacity is often limited to outputs and organizations may require skills in measurement selection, data collection and analysis.

The recent capacity building work did not specifically address these areas in a concerted way, but did provide other lessons for working with midsized groups. One is to allow organizations to control their stipend and manage a relationship with a professional consultant. Most have little experience with this and in itself may provide capacity building around clarifying expectations, reviewing invoices and products. Tying programming dollars to knowledge building is another promising strategy for midsized groups. As groups grow, their needs around capacity building may be more individualized and so having tailored programming would be a benefit.

### **Recommendations**

- Plan ahead – set goals and objectives with evaluation measures set a priori.
  - Organizations can use assistance on how to assess neighborhood needs and develop programs that reflect these needs and the neighborhood action plans already developed.
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- Having hundreds of small organizations working in neighborhoods presents opportunities for expanded reach, but also may produce inefficiency with resources and redundancy of programs. Small grassroots groups are not trained in coalition development and may benefit from organizing strategies that build on common goals and missions and create opportunities for coordinated program planning.
  - Neighborhood governance groups need to understand how to work with community organizations on 1) how to get their clients involved in community events to promote neighborhood well being (e.g., Building Movement is a model developed for engaging service providers in processes of social change); and 2) how to effectively engage organizational stakeholders in partnership for service planning and implementation of neighborhood goals and action plans.
  - While small organizations likely benefitted from the capacity building workshops, assistance with implementation of the strategies learned is most crucial. The Foundation may want to consider a next stage program for a subset of organizations in each neighborhood. A follow-up consulting model that creates accountability and support mechanisms for implementing lessons learned would provide the necessary booster for converting the first phase of readiness work into the transformation stage.
  - The high numbers of participants attending the variety of workshops provided over the past three years indicates a strong desire to learn on the part of nonprofits. There is a clear demand for capacity building and without continued support, the gains made in capacity will be lost.
  - The Foundation should consider efforts to promote further coordination and mergers among some agencies to make better use of resources. Any efforts at consolidation should acknowledge and create a role for the representative of small nonprofits that are closely tied to their neighborhoods.
  - Mini-grant money must be coordinated with an assessment of organizational capacity and tied to completion of training or technical assistance efforts that will help the organization sustain its work. Mini-grant dollars could also be more closely tied to collaborative efforts to promote efficiency.
  - Midsized organizations should be attentive to having Board members with the skills and resources to effectively guide the agency's work.
  - Midsized organizations need staff training for implementation in best practice and evaluation of intervention efforts.
  - Specialized training in research and best practices might be effectively organized by partnering midsized nonprofits with university faculty and staff.
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## IV. TOWARD GOOD SCHOOLS FOR ALL DETROIT'S CHILDREN: Progress, Challenges and Prospects

### EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

*Institute for Research and Reform in Education, Inc.*

What follows is an executive summary of IRRE's recent report – *Analytic Review of the Skillman Foundation's Good Schools program* (2011). In this chapter, page references are provided to the full report now available on line at <http://www.skillman.org/Good-Schools/Evaluation-and-Learning>.

#### **Program Goals and Background**

During more than a half century of commitment to the children of Detroit, the Skillman Foundation has sought to find and support ways to ensure Detroit's children receive a high quality education. Since the founding of public schools early in our nation's history, schools and communities have shared a common path towards improvement and renewal. Today, we see this intimate and evermore complex relationship on display in urban centers across the country. The city of Detroit stands out as a prime example of how closely the fortunes of city schools are tied to the communities in which they reside. This summary and its companion report present key findings of the Institute for Research and Reform in Education's (IRRE) study of the Foundation's strategies and investments within the Good Schools program area.

The goal of the Skillman Foundation's Good Schools program is to have children attend high-quality schools, to graduate from high school and to attend college so they can lead self-sufficient and prosperous lives. In order to address the structural and political reforms necessary to provide high-quality educational opportunities for Detroit youth, the Good Schools program is city-wide in scope but places a special emphasis on six Foundation-targeted neighborhoods. After a long history supporting schools in Detroit, the Foundation's more recent strategies have focused on: 1) identifying and rewarding high performing schools; 2) providing information to parents to help guide their school selection; 3) creating the public and political will to support a city-wide vision for transforming Detroit's failing public school system; 4) constructing a reform infrastructure to plan and implement this vision; and 5) generating more options for high quality education in metropolitan Detroit.

The Skillman Foundation's central focus on *Good Neighborhoods* and *Good Schools*, and their anticipated future integration aligns with research and policy prescriptions from many sectors. The Foundation now seeks to create the conditions and capacity necessary to integrate policy, supports with opportunities in the targeted neighborhoods and the schools that serve their children. The Foundation's theory of change hypothesizes that youth will be safe, healthy, well educated and prepared for adulthood when they have an effective system of supports and opportunities in *both* their schools and neighborhoods and when the broader community has in place the necessary systems and policies that create the conditions for youth to thrive.<sup>57</sup>

In 2007 the Foundation contracted with the Center for Youth and Communities at Brandeis University to serve as its evaluation and learning partner. Their initial work was to clarify the assumptions and logic

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<sup>57</sup> The Skillman Foundation's Good Neighborhoods and Schools Ecological Model.

guiding the Foundation's complex range of grantmaking and change-making strategies with the primary emphasis on the neighborhood-based initiatives. The result was the Readiness Framework, which identifies benchmarks by the time the Readiness Phase was complete in 2010 for each program area of Foundation activity. Because the strategic focus of the education program area was less developed at the time, Foundation staff determined that an analytic review of the work to date would be a useful contribution to the broader Readiness Phase evaluation.

IRRE's review is designed to support the Foundation in articulating and segmenting the Good Schools theory of change to provide greater clarity and specificity around goals, current and future investment strategies and indicators of progress. In order to support this comprehensive assessment of the Good Schools theory of change we conducted three embedded studies designed to enrich our understanding of the work and the implicit theories of change held by Foundation staff and stakeholders: 1) a detailed review of archival and contemporary history of the Good Schools program and the Foundation's investments to improve education in Detroit (Chapter Two); 2) a series of interviews with persons knowledgeable about the Good Schools program to better understand the work within the larger community context (Chapter Three); and 3) a review of similar initiatives and investments by other foundations, community change initiatives and systemic reform efforts across the United States (Chapter Four). Each of these embedded studies provides a different perspective on the underlying narrative and assumptions that shape the Good Schools theory of change. Chapter Five concludes the report by presenting IRRE's understanding (pp. 40 – 51) and evaluation (pp. 51 – 60) of the Good Schools program's theory of change – drawing on all of the data sources used in the previous chapters as well as our own experience working in the urban education field. This chapter's recommendations (pp. 60 – 72) include suggestions for strengthening the Good Schools theory of change to make it even more meaningful, plausible, testable and doable. This chapter also includes an expanded discussion of the Foundation's emerging efforts to integrate the activities and supports of Good Schools and Good Neighborhoods programs (pp. 65 – 68).

### **A Brief History of the Skillman Foundation's Education Investments in Detroit**

Chapter Two in the full report summarizes the history of the Skillman Foundation's commitment to education in the city of Detroit and the evolution of its work leading to the Good Schools program (pp. 4 – 14). Over the last 20 years the Foundation's commitment has included both grantmaking and change-making supports for system-wide and whole-school reform efforts – such as the Comer Schools and Families Initiative, Schools of the 21<sup>st</sup> Century, and the Baldrige Awards – as well as more targeted programs such as early childhood programs and principal leadership training. The work accomplished and the lessons learned in the earlier years have led the Skillman Foundation to the forefront of national efforts to improve communities and schools in a major urban center.

In 2007 the Foundation reallocated and renamed their existing education portfolio of investments into the **Good Schools** program. The education work built upon and sustained several key strategies from Skillman's earlier work such as *Making the Grade* and the *Skillman Scholars* program. However, new investments in support of Good Schools focused more directly on expanding options for high quality education and focusing more intently on the conditions necessary for systemic education change in Detroit rather than funding specific programs. More recent investments have focused on 1) informing the public about school quality and recognizing good schools; 2) increasing the options for children and youth to attend high quality schools through support of new small schools and expanding charter schools in Metropolitan Detroit; 3) creating the conditions (vision, public will, capacity and knowledge, and accountability) necessary for city-wide education reform to be successful; and 4) targeting increased

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support for schools – and the development of new schools – in the Foundation’s six supported neighborhoods.

Good Schools investments have brought marked changes to the landscape of Detroit education. Within the last two years a city-wide vision, plan and an infrastructure – *Excellent Schools Detroit (ESD)* – to improve Detroit schools and keep parents and the larger community informed about the quality of schools has been achieved. By 2010 when ESD’s *Comprehensive Education Plan* was released, the Foundation’s staff and trustees and their strategic partners had improved the probability that system-wide change **could** occur in Detroit. *Excellent Schools Detroit* and the resultant *Education Plan* was the culmination of years of Foundation change-making, capacity building and strategic investments to garner support and attention to the crisis of education in Detroit. The Foundation developed a portfolio of work to prepare itself and community stakeholders for the roll out of a new vision for Detroit education – to create the conditions for meaningful educational improvement. Many of these conditions for truly impactful reform now exist; but challenges remain to ensure change is not only possible and underway, but meaningful and lasting. The most difficult challenges ahead for the Skillman Foundation’s work and for the city of Detroit include:

- Battling the forces of a declining local and national economy where the loss of local jobs and persistent poverty and low educational attainment among citizens overshadow the critical state of public education;
- The effects of a consistently declining student enrollment were further emphasized on February 21, 2011 when the Detroit Public Schools were ordered by State education officials to immediately implement a plan to balance the district’s budget by closing half of its schools. The Foundation will need to navigate (as it has in the past) the tension between closing low performing schools and the need to have good schools in the six targeted neighborhoods;
- Ensuring the rapidly growing charter school population in Detroit gets high quality educational supports and includes the students who need these supports the most; and
- Taking its education improvement work to the next level of scale and quality which will require increased collaboration, precision in specifying the actions, indicators and outcomes of each investment strategy and mutual accountability among all partners in the work.

The history of the Foundation’s evolving education strategy demonstrates that change in education systems is a lengthy, costly process – taking years just to get the conditions right for reform to have a chance. Given the increasing local and national attention and increased resources being directed toward Detroit, the community appears to have a new architecture and increased sense of urgency to advance toward the Foundation’s Good Schools goal of having children attend high-quality schools, to graduate from high school and to attend college so they can lead self-sufficient and prosperous lives.

### **Stakeholders Perceptions of the Good Schools Program**

Twenty three key informants identified by the Foundation were interviewed by IRRE researchers in order to learn about their perceptions of and experiences with the Good Schools program. The informants included Foundation leaders and staff, key advisors and consultants to the Foundation, civic leaders, leaders of community organizations closely partnered with the Foundation, principals of partner schools, and leaders of other Detroit or Michigan-based foundations.<sup>58</sup> The perspective of these

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<sup>58</sup> The following organizations were represented by interviewees: the Skillman Foundation, United Way of Southeastern Michigan, Institute for Student Achievement, Detroit Public Schools, City of Detroit, Michigan Future, Inc., Michigan Association of Public School Administrators,

stakeholders was particularly valuable as it revealed how well the Good Schools program is understood by stakeholders and where misconceptions exist. Interviewees were asked to provide their perspective through the lens of the following questions: what have been the major accomplishments and challenges of the program to date as you understand the program and what suggestions do you have for strengthening the program going forward.

**Major Milestones and Accomplishments.** Dominant themes emerging from interviews with stakeholders revealed that external stakeholders generally did not distinguish among different activities within the Good Schools program. In addition most informants had experience and/or knowledge of either elements of the Good Schools program or with *Excellent Schools Detroit*. Only a few had involvement with both. The following key accomplishments were noted for the Good Schools program in Detroit: 1) the Good Schools program raised awareness about the performance of schools; 2) the program changed the conversation from a focus on school governance to one about school quality; 3) the program rewarded good performance by providing monetary awards and recognition for schools that performed well; 4) the program provided technical assistance to schools in developing and implementing goals; and 5) the Good Schools program established new small schools in Detroit.

The following key accomplishments were noted for ESD: 1) *Excellent Schools Detroit* engaged a broad coalition of leaders around quality education; 2) the Foundation's work through the Good Schools program helped develop ESD – a city-wide plan/blueprint to improve educational outcomes; 3) the Foundation launched new schools through the Michigan Futures High School Accelerator and the Education Venture Fund; 4) the Foundation continued to focus the educational dialogue on quality even when distractions from the Detroit Public Schools, state and local leaders and other stakeholders sought to focus on governance issues; 5) the Foundation developed an annual school report card for all Detroit schools – Making the Grade – that was the blueprint for the *Excellent Schools Detroit* annual report card; and 6) the Foundation sponsored Parent School Shopper Fairs to help parents learn more about high-performing schools and how to enroll their children in them.

**Significant Challenges to the Work of Improving Educational Outcomes.** Informants were asked to share their thoughts on the challenges that the Foundation faces in the Good Schools work that impacts its effectiveness in attaining the goals of increasing graduation and college and career readiness. Themes emerging from stakeholder responses can be ordered by prominence: 1) the climate and culture surrounding education in Detroit; 2) the ongoing dysfunction within the Detroit Public School district; 3) challenges associated with the teachers union/collective bargaining agreement; 4) local city-wide politics; 5) school-level issues: leadership changes and school closings; 6) operationalizing the *Excellent Schools Detroit* plan so that it can achieve its stated aims; and 7) the residual effects of the Foundation's involvement in the effort to achieve mayoral control of the schools.

**Synthesis of Interviews with Stakeholders.** Several key findings emerged that warrant the Foundation's attention. Clear communication strategies with key stakeholders are essential to ensure their understanding of the work. Even those stakeholders identified by the Foundation as being most involved in the work of the Foundation were confused about how Foundation initiatives such as *Excellent Schools Detroit* and Good Schools related to one another causing many to equate one initiative with another. Further, this particular group of interviewees equated the Good Schools work primarily with its Making



the Grade (MTG) program. On the positive side the informants' view of MTG is generally very positive as is the view of *Excellent Schools Detroit* in having made an impressive start.

Both the Good Schools program and *Excellent Schools Detroit* have increased respect for the Skillman Foundation throughout the greater Detroit area. The Foundation is seen as a leader in keeping the community focused on education and promoting and supporting quality education for all students. On the other hand, as the Foundation moves into a new phase of work it is incumbent upon the Foundation's leaders to keep in mind some concerns that were offered by key stakeholders such as the notion that the Foundation plays a mostly "insider" game and that their approach to reform is too "top down."

### **The National Context for Skillman Foundation Investments in School Reform**

Today foundations play a vital and expanding role in instigating, supporting and sustaining education reform. Despite a heightened visibility in current times, foundation giving still represents a relatively small fraction of education budgets when compared to local, state and federal contributions. This reality brings to the fore the stakes foundations face in making their investments – human, political and financial – in education.

In order to situate the work of the Skillman Foundation within the national context of education reform and philanthropic strategy we have identified three major entry points that characterize how foundations across the United States are impacting education. We also believe these entry points reflect to different degrees core components of the Skillman Foundation's own history. These entry points are: 1) shaping public **education policy** (local, state and/or federal); 2) supporting **community organizing** efforts to improve schools; and 3) investing in **school and district** level reforms.

Across each of these three entry points we have sought to highlight research, practice and investments that clarify the potential and challenges of planning and implementing work like the Skillman Foundation's Good Schools program.

***Foundation Investment in Policymaking.*** Shaping public policy is part of what all foundations do – whether locally or at a state or national level. As change-makers and funders, foundations inhabit a unique position and can provide education reform efforts with a distinctive blend of human, political and financial supports. Two major take-aways reinforce the importance of continued efforts to impact and support changes to education policy:

1. *Foundations should continue targeting investments in policy changes at the local, state and/or federal levels for two reasons.* First, the investments and the policy change can help remove barriers to the innovations being implemented with sufficient fidelity and breadth to make a meaningful difference. Second, these policy-focused investments can address the structural inequities that create the need for these investments in the first place, and by doing so, break the cycle of reinvestment.
  2. *The current climate is ripe for collaboration between foundations and policymakers.* The examples highlighted in Chapter Four are used to emphasize that the conditions across the education reform landscape – including shrinking state, local and federal education budgets – heighten the urgency of explicitly collaborative efforts where resources are combined toward a shared focus rather than redundant or competitive.
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**Community Organizing Approaches to School Reform.** The research base detailing the importance of neighborhood and community factors in healthy youth development and educational outcomes is vast and compelling. However, the knowledge base and evidence of success for combining neighborhood and community improvement with efforts to reform schools is sparse and underdeveloped. Our review of this work in communities around the country identifies two primary take-aways:

1. *Connecting community organizing strategies to meaningful improvements in schools is highly challenging and the small number of successes will be difficult to replicate.* Our review (pp. 30 – 35) provides examples of how similar efforts across different communities can produce divergent results.
2. *Articulating a clear and testable theory of change for how community organizing strategies connect to improvements in schools – through what kinds of specific activities and with what intended intermediate and long-term outcomes – could bring greater focus and accountability to these efforts.*

**Investing in School- and District-level Reforms.** Despite ongoing debates among pundits, significant agreement exists within the research and practice communities about the critical components of effective school improvement. Where authentic debates lie are in *how* we get evidence-based practices implemented successfully in ways that address the most students, in most need, the most quickly and sustainably. Two critical take-aways from IRRE’s review of national, regional and district efforts to create large numbers of good schools are:

1. *Though comprehensive school reform and the new small/charter schools movement have had important successes, neither approach has yet produced consistent results at scale.* Today, some national efforts to improve or create large numbers of schools are increasingly looking to disseminate and implement the most effective features and practices coming from both of these reform movements – practices that cut across governance platforms such as charter, private and public schools.
2. *Philanthropic and public investors are turning toward investments in human capital as a critical component to achieve scale in educational improvement at the local, state and national levels.* Increasingly evidence is making clear that creating strong and sustainable systems of human capital are a keystone of successful reform efforts.

It is worth noting that the lessons emerging from this review of the national context aligns well with the Skillman Foundation’s Good Schools program strategies and activities; both in terms of progress being made and challenges being faced. As such we can be confident that the Foundation’s work is and will continue to be at the cutting edge of national philanthropic efforts to improve the lives of young people in urban communities.

### **The Good Schools Program Theory of Change: Description, Evaluation and Recommendations**

The final section of our report presents IRRE’s understanding of the Foundation’s theory of change for the Good Schools program (pp. 40-51). Recognizing that theories of change had already been developed for this and other Foundation programs, IRRE reviewed these documents but also sought to articulate our understanding of the theory of change based on the interview data, analysis of other Foundation documents, review of the national context and ongoing discussions with senior program staff.

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The theory of change process (Connell and Kubisch, 1995; 1998; Connell and Klem, 2001) begins with the long-term outcomes of the initiative and works backward to the intermediate outcomes seen to impact these long-term outcomes and finally to the strategies being implemented to impact these intermediate outcomes (see SL-1). Theories of change are improved by surfacing, examining and, if possible, strengthening the assumptions that underlie the logical connections made in the theory of change – particularly those between the implementation of strategies and their intended intermediate outcomes (SL-2). The overarching theory of change for the Good Schools program based on IRRE’s analysis is shown in (SL-6). In our report, we segment the theory of change by each of the intermediate outcomes.

For each of these intermediate outcomes we present a finer-grained analysis of the activities within the key investment strategies and surface assumptions underlying the links between these activities and the intermediate and long-term outcomes. Based on this analysis of the theory of change we then evaluated the strength of the theory of change (pp. 51 – 60) against four criteria (Connell and Kubisch, 1998; Connell and Klem, 2001).

1. *Meaningfulness.* Are the outcomes included in the theory of change and the definitions of success on these outcomes worth the investments being made in achieving them?
2. *Plausibility.* Are the logical connections made in the theory of change between intermediate and long-term outcomes, and between the strategies and activities being implemented and these outcomes believable? Are stakeholders confident that “if we do these things, we will produce these outcomes”?
3. *Testability.* Is the theory of change specified with enough clarity and precision that we can track predicted change in its outcomes and implementation of its activities? Are data being collected in ways that allow us to get some purchase on the causal connections between activities and outcomes?
4. *Doability.* Are the political, economic and human resources the right ones and sufficient to implement the strategies and activities with the fidelity and intensity needed to produce predicted change in the outcomes?

Summary results of this evaluation are shown in Table 1 below.

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**Table 1 - Theory of Change Evaluation Summary**

Evaluation Criteria	Assessment
<b>Meaningful</b>	
Are the targeted <i>long-term outcomes</i> of the Good Schools program worth the investments the Foundation is making in achieving them?	<b>Yes</b> , having all Detroit’s children and youth achieve these outcomes, clearly qualifies as a meaningful aspirational goal. Expected levels of these outcomes and their indicators will need to be specified against a timeline.
Are the <i>intermediate outcomes</i> – creating knowledge and will, building reform infrastructure, targeted neighborhood good school access and a graduation pipeline – meaningful steps toward the long-term outcomes?	<b>Yes</b> , assuming threshold levels of more clearly defined measures of these outcomes have been articulated.

Evaluation Criteria	Assessment
<b>Plausible</b>	
Is it plausible to hypothesize that achieving threshold levels on all of the intermediate outcomes will be sufficient to impact the long-term outcomes?	<b>Yes</b> , but how much of an impact will depend on the threshold levels set on the intermediate outcomes and the time frames for meeting those thresholds.
Will the investment strategies and their associated activities produce the required threshold levels on the intermediate outcomes?	<b>Unclear</b> until the activities are more fully fleshed out based, in part, on the critical decisions described in the body of the <i>Analytic Review</i> report.
<b>Testable</b>	
Are indicators of the <i>long-term</i> outcomes being measured precisely enough and for a sufficient period of time to assess credibly whether they are showing meaningful change?	<b>Not at this time.</b>
Are indicators of the <i>intermediate</i> outcomes being measured precisely enough and for a sufficient period of time to assess credibly whether they are showing meaningful change?	<b>Not at this time.</b>
Are there clear enough implementation standards and measures of these standards to assess quality and breadth of Foundation-funded activities’ implementation?	<b>Not at this time.</b>
Is there a research design that will allow confident interpretation of connections between changes in activities, intermediate and long-term outcomes?	<b>For some outcomes and not others.</b> It might be possible to draw some inferences about whether and how much Foundation-funded activities have contributed to several of the neighborhood-focused intermediate outcomes. Because of the larger number of influences on the city-wide outcomes and the difficulties measuring these other influences, testing these causal connections in the theory of change will be more challenging.

Evaluation Criteria	Assessment
<b>Doable</b>	
Are the financial, political and human resources available and allocated to the program’s activities sufficient to support their successful implementation?	<b>Indeterminate</b> until activities are prioritized and more fully defined.

Next, we prepared a set of recommendations for how the Foundation can strengthen its theory of change along all four of these quality dimensions – with particular emphasis on the plausibility and testability of the theory of change (pp. 60 – 72). These recommendations are summarized in Table 2 below.

**Table 2 - Theory of Change Recommendations**

Criteria	Recommendation
<b>Meaningful</b>	
How to make the targeted <i>long-term outcomes</i> – all Detroit’s students graduating from high school prepared for post-secondary education or work – a more compelling target for the Foundation’s education investments.	Articulate a five-year timeline with projected growth on long-term outcomes and their leading indicators (see recommendations below under <b>Testable</b> for suggested indicators). Show how these growth projections differ from any increases shown up to this point.
How to make the <i>intermediate outcomes</i> – creating will, building reform infrastructure, targeted neighborhood Good Schools access and graduation pipeline – more convincing as steps toward the long-term outcomes.	Describe, with vivid examples, what each of these outcomes will look like in advance of the long-term outcomes achieving their targeted levels. For example, in two years: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• how will parent, public and private will be manifested differently than today;</li> <li>• what new supports will Detroit children’s schools be getting to improve themselves;</li> <li>• how will the quality and intensity of those supports match up to other urban districts nationally;</li> <li>• how many more families in the Foundation’s neighborhoods will be sending their students to high quality schools; and,</li> <li>• what do graduating students say are the kinds of “pipeline supports” that made a big difference in their success?</li> </ul>
<b>Plausible</b>	
How to strengthen the argument that achieving threshold levels on all of the intermediate outcomes will be sufficient to impact the long-term outcomes?	Articulate clear and interpretable thresholds for how good is good enough on a small number of “bellwether” indicators for each of the intermediate outcomes: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• what does strong enough parent, public and political will look like;</li> <li>• what are the essential elements of a reform infrastructure – what quality and breadth of supports will reform support intermediaries be providing to schools in Detroit;</li> <li>• what mechanisms will be in place for getting the best national</li> </ul>

Criteria	Recommendation
	<p>and local talent into schools serving Detroit’s students;</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• how many students in the targeted neighborhoods will be supported by high quality youth development programs aligned with students’ developmental and educational needs?</li> </ul> <p>State where the Foundation’s biggest bets are being made. Which of these intermediate outcomes does the Foundation believe: a) will have the biggest impact on the long-term outcomes; and, b) can be most impacted by the Foundation’s investments?</p>
<p>How to strengthen the argument that the Foundation’s investment strategies and their associated activities will produce the required threshold levels on the intermediate outcomes?</p>	<p><b>Parent, Public and Political Will</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• More thoroughly identify barriers and opportunities for parents to enroll their students in high quality schools.</li> <li>• Based on these results, support new activities to support these parents’ successful navigation of the school selection and enrollment process.</li> </ul> <p><b>Access to High Quality Schools in Targeted Neighborhoods</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Make sure ESD and other collaborative funding and policy-change efforts continue to support successful K-12 school reform efforts in targeted neighborhoods.</li> <li>• Continue to use academic commitment (attendance, discipline, engagement, persistence, graduation and dropout rates) and performance indicators (state test scores, college entrance exams, AP enrollment and passing rates, college-required course grades) to define high quality.</li> <li>• Expand definitions of high quality to include a limited menu of practices that <u>all</u> schools enrolling the target neighborhoods’ children and young people will embrace – including new schools, transforming schools and improving schools in the neighborhood, as well as schools outside the neighborhood who serve neighborhood students.</li> <li>• In selecting these practices, ensure: a) their strong evidence base and alignment with federal and state improvement criteria: and, b) that sufficient, high quality technical assistance and professional development are available to implement these practices in targeted schools.</li> <li>• Use data from indicators of effective practices to provide periodic monitoring of implementation fidelity and quality as part of the Foundation’s “dashboard”; to understand quickly why student outcomes are or are not improving; and to make mid-course corrections.</li> <li>• Support and expect schools, the community constituencies, the Foundation, other funders and policymakers to use this dashboard as a common focus for discussion and decision-making.</li> <li>• Use the dashboard to identify and place all schools serving targeted neighborhoods’ young people along a readiness</li> </ul>

Criteria	Recommendation
	<p>continuum for use in targeting Foundation and other resources to their improvement, replacement or augmentation with new schools.</p> <p><b>City-wide Reform Infrastructure</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Select and invest in reform support and new school providers for school creation, transformation and improvement who have demonstrated capacity to support high priority practices common to good schools.</li> <li>• Work with national teacher and leader recruitment organizations and other funding and educational partners a) to ensure sufficient numbers of placements of new teachers and leaders in schools; and b) to customize training and certification process so they align with high priority practices being implemented in new, transforming and improving schools.</li> </ul> <p><b>Pipeline Toward Graduation in Targeted Neighborhoods</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Create “pipeline to graduation” continua of supports for customized implementation in targeted neighborhoods. Do this work collaboratively with existing youth development grantees, neighborhood groups with credible knowledge of youth needs, reform support providers and change leaders from new, transforming and improving schools and national youth development and education experts. See extended discussion of this recommendation on pp. 65 – 68 of the report.</li> </ul> <p>Create triage strategies to prioritize initial pipeline activities (e.g., identify juniors and seniors in targeted neighborhoods for immediate contact and supports, get names of incoming freshman in lowest quality schools and contact with immediate supports). Examples of initial pipeline activities might include the development of early warning system reports for incoming freshman and assignment of the highest risk students to mentors or advocates within the school and/or in the community.</p>
<p><b>Doable</b></p> <p>Are the financial, political and human resources available and allocated to the program’s activities sufficient to support their successful implementation?</p>	<p>Once the Foundation prioritizes and maps out the planned activities within each of its investment strategies and the thresholds for implementation fidelity/quality, create a resource map where the financial, human and political resources available for each of these activities is described.</p> <p>Subject this resource map to internal and external review to get feedback on whether the allocated resources are the right ones and sufficient to ensure hitting the implementation quality thresholds.</p>

Criteria	Recommendation
<b>Testable</b>	
<p>Strengthen the Foundation’s capacity to track progress on all elements of its theory of change: to report timely and credible results to multiple constituencies, make mid-course corrections in its priorities and investments and evaluate the validity of its assumptions and strategic decisions (pp. 68 – 72).</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Augment current efforts to obtain a student tracking system for Detroit.</li> <li>• Add leading indicators of the long-term outcomes to this tracking system.</li> <li>• Expand existing school-level indicators of quality to include measures of effective practices and policies.</li> <li>• Gather and use assessments of “pipeline” supports for targeted neighborhoods’ children and youth to assess and report progress and make mid-course corrections.</li> <li>• Carefully track measures of the city-wide intermediate outcomes in the Foundation’s targeted neighborhoods first.</li> <li>• Further develop implementation standards and benchmarking of those standards for Foundation-funded activities in highest priority investment areas.</li> </ul>

At the Foundation’s request we included in our report more extended discussions of how to strengthen the plausibility of the theory of change by integrating some of the Foundation’s efforts across the Good Schools, Good Neighborhoods and Youth Development program areas. This discussion drew on the recent meeting of evaluators at Brandeis University that IRRE attended. In brief, our program integration recommendation was that the Foundation expect and support its community, youth development and education partners to work together and form a continuum of care for students living in the Foundation’s targeted neighborhoods. This continuum would include sets of specific activities for targeted children and youth in which adults (and where possible peers) they encounter at school, at home, in their neighborhoods and youth organizations work *in concert* to support these young people’s successful completion of high school and preparation for post-secondary work or education.

### Final Thoughts

In summarizing our analytic review’s findings, IRRE affirms the Foundation’s cutting edge efforts to improve the lot of Detroit’s children and young people through strengthening their educational opportunities. We find these efforts to be aligned with the Foundation’s stakeholders’ values and other prominent national efforts’ experience and research to date. We applaud the Foundation’s longstanding commitment to four principles underlying the Good Schools program:

1. Focus on what individual children and their families need to gain access to high quality educational experiences;
  2. Work toward this goal in different ways and at all levels of the context that affect what happens to children and youth in school;
  3. Try to ensure that these diverse and often divergent forces become and then stay focused on doing what it takes to make access to quality education possible; and
  4. Invest resources in making sure the first three principles are visibly enacted in specific places where there is the most need.
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The Institute for Research and Reform in Education’s recommendations seek to build upon the Foundation’s ongoing work and these four principles. We thank Foundation staff and all participants in our review for their forthrightness and support in this project. We hope this summary and our full report will aid in your journey toward transforming the life chances of Detroit’s children and youth.

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# FROM TOWER TO GROUND: Systems and Policy Change in the Good Neighborhoods and Good Schools Initiative

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## INTRODUCTION

In 2008 The Skillman Foundation launched the Readiness Phase of its Good Neighborhoods Initiative and at the same time shifted its other major programmatic emphasis, Good Schools, to create a larger, more integrated effort, the Good Neighborhoods and Good Schools Initiative (GN/GS). This three-year phase followed a two-year planning period that brought the Foundation and its GN/GS partners to the starting line for a ten-year, \$100 million investment in “changing the odds for kids” in six target neighborhoods<sup>59</sup> –Brightmoor, Chadsey Condon, Cody Rouge, Northend Central Woodward, Osborn, and Southwest Detroit<sup>60</sup> – by “improving the quality of schools and transforming the neighborhoods into safe and nurturing environments.”<sup>61</sup>

Leading up to, and during, the planning period, the Foundation assessed the quality of life for Detroit children and youth and refined its vision and mission for the next decade. The resulting “imperative of creating transformational change on behalf of children”<sup>62</sup> required a new way of working and a new approach to positively impact the lives of children. In February 2007 the Trustees and Foundation staff finalized the Sustainability Plan, including their theory of change and logic model.

Early in this “new way of working,” the Foundation moved its offices from the downtown Renaissance Towers to a ground floor office suite in a repurposed industrial complex on the Detroit River. This was an intentional signal that the Foundation work would be “grounded in community.”

From the beginning, the Foundation recognized that “grantmaking alone cannot create transformative change” and identified “changemaking” as a complementary strategy, with a focus on systems and policy change.

*Foundation works — formally and informally — to align diverse interests and players around a common agenda; ensure that those typically excluded have a seat at the civic table; draw attention to needs and opportunities for investment; insert new ideas and knowledge into the*

The Foundation moved its offices from the downtown Renaissance Towers to a ground floor office suite in a repurposed industrial complex .... The move from “Tower to Ground” was a big – and visible – step that... reflected the Foundation’s transformation.

The Foundation described Changemaking in this way: “[Changemaking] refers to non-grantmaking practices and roles through which the Foundation serves as convener, broker, public educator, problem-solver, and/or advocate to advance an agenda for Detroit children. The

<sup>59</sup> Key neighborhood selection criteria were a relatively high population of children; demonstrated need with respect to child wellbeing; and demonstrated community readiness to address problems and mobilize resources to support and nurture children.

<sup>60</sup> Going forward in this report, the common or shorthand names for the neighborhoods will be used: Brightmoor, Chadsey Condon, Cody Rouge, Northend, Osborn and Southwest.

<sup>61</sup> Tonya Allen, Memorandum to Trustees, November 2008.

<sup>62</sup> Carol Goss, Memorandum to Trustees, February 2007.

*civic discussion; develop support for change and mobilize political will; and wield influence — behind the scenes and more publicly — with key leaders and institutions.”<sup>63</sup>*

In 2008, the Changemaking strategy for systems and policy change had four elements: Influence, Champions, Leverage, and Scale.<sup>64</sup> Over time, the element of progress indicators was added. Exhibit 1 identifies the four elements and their definitions, as well as the indicators of progress. This articulation of Changemaking and new way of working for Skillman reflects a systems approach to creating deep and sustainable change. The Foundation’s plan is to engage the three essential actors required for societal change: the public and private sectors and community.<sup>65 66</sup>

### **Purpose and Methodology**

The purpose of this systems and policy sub-study was to evaluate progress toward the Systems and Policy Change Readiness Phase Indicators; assess readiness to achieve the 2016 goals; and make recommendations for learning and improvement for the Transformation Phase 2011 – 2016. The report is not intended to be a complete documentation of all of the Foundation’s system and policy change efforts.

### **PROGRESS TOWARDS READINESS PHASE INDICATORS**

It is noteworthy that the Foundation’s Changemaking plans share common strategies with other community change initiative’s taking on systems and policy change: (1) “illuminating and legitimizing community-level work and community priorities, (2) brokering and aligning efforts, (3)... building partnerships with powerful allies, [and] (4) infiltrating the language, frameworks, and methods of public and philanthropic leaders.”<sup>67 68</sup> Evaluation findings suggest that Skillman has demonstrated skill in implementing these types of strategies.

When The Skillman Foundation embarked on systems and policy change it literally was “flying the plane as it was being built.” Systems and policy change is a challenging task and the Foundation has experienced many of the issues faced by other community change initiatives over time. This includes attempting social change with systems that are slow to change on their own but subject to political and economic forces that can dramatically alter the landscape the Foundation is trying to impact. Three examples of this happened during the Readiness Phase: a rapid succession of political leadership in the City, the Detroit Public Schools leadership and financial emergency, and the automobile industry crisis. Further, attempting to track and quantify leveraged funds and maintaining a sense of shared leadership with other investors in the effort poses ownership sensitivities. Also, in play as is with other funding sources is how Skillman justifies that the resources it cites as leveraged were a new investment rather than something that may have happened in any case<sup>69</sup> and how much credit it is willing to share.

**Is GN/GS ready?** The evidence demonstrates that, while formal system and policy change planning may not be the strategy of choice for GN/GS and internal and external communication needs improvement,

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<sup>63</sup> The Skillman Foundation, A Response to the White House Office of Urban Affairs, Neighborhood Revitalization Initiative, April 2011.

<sup>64</sup> Sustainability Plan 2007 and Lisa Cylar Miller, Memorandum to Trustees, November 2008.

<sup>65</sup> Community here refers to nonprofits, informal groups and individuals.

<sup>66</sup> Waddell, S., (2001). “Societal Learning: Creating Big-Systems Change,” *The Systems Thinker*, Volume 12, Number 10. Pegasus Communications.

<sup>67</sup> Kubisch, A. Overview of Community Change Efforts, 1980—2010 in Kubisch, Auspos, Brown, and Dewar (2010), *Voices from the Field III: Lessons and Challenges from Three Decades of Community Change Efforts*. Washington, DC: The Aspen Institute.

<sup>68</sup> Waddell, S., (2001).

<sup>69</sup> Ibid.

the Foundation's adaptive capacity, strategic positioning, agility, and ability to work in a chaotic environment in order to seize resources and opportunities have been productive and successful, as has its relationship building. The answer is a qualified "yes" on the systems and policy front. The Foundation can take pride in the returns that its efforts have begun to show. Skillman's work seems to have provided focus and incentives for its own efforts and those of other partners and funders, as they consider options for neighborhood investment. This is an important because "it is likely that the presence of an organized, legitimate, and effective community intervention in a neighborhood increases the visibility of a community's change efforts and gives enhanced credibility to neighborhood activities that, in turn, lead to additional investments."<sup>70</sup> However, achieving the 2016 Goals for systems and policy change demands even more strenuous, plan-full, and targeted strategies and will force the Foundation to consider what it will "do" (directly) and what it will "make happen" in the next phase of operation.

The following section offers lessons and recommendations for learning, improvement and capacity to achieve the 2016 Goals. That section is followed by a conclusion that puts the Skillman Foundation work in this area in a national context.

## **LESSONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS FOR LEARNING, IMPROVEMENT AND CAPACITY TO ACHIEVE THE 2016 GOALS**

The following lessons and recommendations emerge from the findings of the Readiness Phase evaluation and point to improvements to strengthen systems and policy change efforts to attain the 2016 Goals. They point directly to the leadership role the Foundation can play to improve its Changemaking strategy.

- 1. Balance planning and doing.** By its nature systems and policy work will continue to be both planned and opportunistic. The Foundation has accomplished a lot in systems and policy change in the past three years—often without an explicit written plan for each strategic element. This reflects a common tension between strategy articulation and implementation – or between planning and doing. Skillman's strategy and tactics have been grounded in and guided by the GN/GS theory of change and fundamental commitment to improving conditions in the six neighborhoods and education in Detroit. And the strategy has been confounded and challenged by extraordinary economic, social and political factors. This has allowed execution to be relatively focused while the public problems they intend to ameliorate have grown dramatically. At the same time, Skillman and its partners have been able to innovate under pressure, take advantage of opportunities and have tried to avoid over-planning and paralysis as often happen in such environments. It has helped to have financial and other resources to seed pilot projects or generate interest and momentum in a targeted change effort.

*"In real life, strategy is actually very straightforward.  
You pick a general direction and implement like hell."  
– Jack Welch, former CEO, General Electric*

The Foundation has been nimble, smart and quick at decision making and moving in the desired direction. The challenge is to avoid the "activity trap" – following leads or engaging in activities that

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<sup>70</sup> Op cit.

are not prioritized. One question to be asked is, “Would more be accomplished with an explicit policy plan with targets and a clearer understanding of what the Foundation’s central role should be?”

- a. **RECOMMENDATION: Assess competencies and strategies needed for policy and systems change today, engage in ongoing strategy planning to provide more focus and direction for change efforts and ensure Changemaking staff and partners are on the same page.** At the same time, it makes sense to leave room for maneuvering, taking advantage of opportunities, and customizing activities.
  - b. **RECOMMENDATION: Set policy and system change targets that are strongly linked to the outcomes and to a realistic assessment of resources the Foundation can bring to bear and what partners can make happen.** Even with a “narrowed” focus on the long-term outcomes of youth who are safe, healthy, well educated, and prepared for adulthood, the Foundation cannot do everything itself to achieve these outcomes. While this is common knowledge, it is also common practice to take on too much and dilute efforts. Foundation time and resources are precious and system and policy change can be all consuming. This is something the Foundation is acutely aware of. Yet, the system and policy agenda as it is played out by Skillman is quite expansive. The Foundation’s mantra of “relentless prioritization” must be applied with rigor to determine what the Foundation can do itself and what can and should be done by others.
  - c. **RECOMMENDATION: Once the policy plan and targets are developed, assess talents and skills of Foundation staff, policy grantees and neighborhood leaders and distribute responsibility for systems and policy change among them to best achieve outcomes.** In assuming this leadership role ensure that there is a strong communications system to keep these partners abreast of breaking news, tactical changes and ongoing issues, and provide training and technical assistance to build an increasingly sophisticated pool of change agents and change leaders.
2. **Increase impact by focusing more on system integration and resource development.** For all that has been accomplished in systems and policy change, there is more work ahead. Conspicuous by their absence were interviewee references to integrate funding from federal programs that could strengthen GN/GS efforts, including Temporary Assistance for Needy Families, various Department of Housing and Urban Development programs, the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program, and various workforce development funds. To move forward with systems integration and obtaining resources, Skillman and its partners should look to better uses of government funding. For example, in the context of the 2016 Goals and in the interest of “preparing young people for adulthood” in a continually shrinking economy, the Foundation could consider launching an aggressive campaign to integrate federal, state, and local workforce development resources. This might be a new leadership role for the YEC.
- a. **RECOMMENDATION: Implement a robust systems integration plan to take advantage of federal funding sources that are not obvious.** To achieve models of systems integration, which is a 2016 Goal, or to capture Federal opportunities and leverage sufficient public and private resources for sustainable neighborhood schools, it would be beneficial to think through how to address the inevitable shifts that occur in policies and resources as a result of politics, the economy, public opinion, and other environmental factors.
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Exhibit 6 offers a simple overview of some Federal agencies with workforce development budgets that could be coordinated as a model of systems integration. Many national organizations (e.g., CLASP) are designing integration models that are likely to grow in popularity as Federal resources continue to decline. Detroit could provide leadership in the area because of the infrastructure it has created through GN/GS and thereby influence the policy and regulators directing the flow of funds for general workforce and youth employment. Similar tables could be constructed for other areas of GN/GS work to highlight funds that may be available.

3. **Position the 2016 Task Force as “results oriented leadership to achieve community change for children” and as a vibrant community action information network.**
  - a. **RECOMMENDATION: Establish a policy team or sub-committee of the 2016 Task Force with an internal lead person at the Foundation to develop a blueprint for systems and policy action across government and philanthropy, business.**
  - b. **RECOMMENDATION: Disseminate an annual dashboard report on progress towards GN/GS 2016 Goals.**
4. **Given that the original champion strategy has been put on hold but has had positive results to the extent it was implemented, re-think its purpose and how it could best be implemented.** It has the potential with more champions involved to bolster the “movement” GN/GS is trying to build.
  - a. **RECOMMENDATION: Personalize the strategy with new champions from all sectors and move them into the spotlight and call out neighborhood champions as well.**

## **CONCLUSION AND NATIONAL CONTEXT**

Right from the start, systems and policy change was on the agenda for the Good Neighborhoods/Good Schools Initiative. The theory of change and the “outer rim” of the ecological model identified broad targets for the Foundation to leverage its dollars, knowledge and network<sup>71</sup> to impact policy and systems change knowing that would be necessary to sustain the work.

As historian James Allen Smith suggests, this is nothing new in and of itself. Foundations “have worked to shape policies by using the influence of their boards, by molding elite public opinion, by pursuing campaigns of public information and education, by creating demonstration projects, by using their financial resources strategically to leverage public funds, and by pursuing direct legislative lobbying, judicial strategies, and executive branch persuasion. They have worked at every level of government.”<sup>72</sup>

The policy and system targets taken on by the Skillman Foundation reflect all of the areas Smith suggests less direct lobbying (the Tax Reform Act of 1969 put an end to that). Because of this range of action and flexibility, private foundation dollars can be important engines for policy change, especially in the hands of progressive leaders. A recent report from the Sillerman Center for the Advancement of Philanthropy at Brandeis University depicts the kind of leadership we have witnessed at the Skillman Foundation:

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<sup>71</sup> In writing about foundations and public policy making, James M. Terris, Professor and Director on the center on Philanthropy and Public Policy at the University of Southern California, acknowledges that “Public policy engagement is a natural extension of foundation efforts to address public problems. Foundations have a range of assets—dollars, knowledge and networks – that can be leveraged to impact public policy.” Copyright 2003. Foundations and Public Policy Making, Leveraging Philanthropic Dollars, Knowledge and Networks. Center on Philanthropy and Public Policy.

<sup>72</sup> James Allen Smith, “Foundations and Public Policy: A Historical Perspective.” Research Paper 11, May 2002. The Center on Philanthropy and Public Policy, University of Southern California, Los Angeles, CA.

“The recent rise of some new philanthropists... has ushered in a new era of attention to investing in social change. The self-described “next generation” of philanthropists has started to look at philanthropy as another form of investment, rather than charity, coining terms such as “social entrepreneurship” and “venture philanthropy” to convey a more engaged role in guiding the use of philanthropic dollars.”<sup>73</sup>

An investment mindset with a results-oriented leadership team is omnipresent at the Skillman Foundation and within the Good Neighborhoods/Good Schools Initiative. They are expecting a return on the investments and have set up a dashboard and performance management system (PMS) to keep them on track. It is important to note that the PMS also traces external factors that impact the pace and potential of change knowing that systems and policy change are long term goals.

As described in the body of this report and summarized in the Topline Report, the four changemaking elements making up the Skillman Foundation policy and system change strategy included:

- **Influence** – Harnessing Skillman’s reputation as a supporter of Detroit’s children to attract others, inspire ideas, sway decisions, and promote opinions “on behalf of the change agenda”
- **Champions** – Engaging influential people and institutions “more directly and explicitly in the Foundation’s work;”
- **Leverage** – Pursuing relationships with other funders (and factoring the potential for leverage into funding decisions) with the goal of leveraging Skillman’s investments in place-based change by a ratio of 5:1; and
- **Scale** – Targeting investments to have the greatest impact on the most children, aiming to expand and replicate strong models and privileges, and influencing policymakers and public entities.

The results, detailed in the report, are impressive given the chaotic political climate and severe economic decline in Detroit.

Furthermore, from a national perspective, the strategies the Foundation employed for policy and systems engagement in Detroit are closely aligned with those identified in a 2009 report from the Center on Philanthropy and Public Policy.<sup>74</sup> This report examined the staff structure and strategies utilized by nineteen foundations involved in public policy work. Exhibit 7 below from the Center report identifies “the seven primary avenues through which the foundations saw themselves working to influence public policy” and mirrors the Skillman Foundation’s four pronged approach.

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<sup>73</sup> Rebecca Stone, “Dynamic Families: How Small Family Foundations Decide to Make Big Changes Through Public Policy.” 2009. The Sillerman Center for the Advancement of Philanthropy, The Heller School for Social Policy and Management, Brandeis University, Waltham, MA.

<sup>74</sup> James M. Ferris and Hilary J. Harmssen. “Foundation Practices for Public Policy Engagement.” Research Paper-33, December 2009. The Center for Philanthropy and Public Policy, University of Southern California, Los Angeles, CA.

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**Exhibit 7**  
**Foundation Practices for Public Policy Engagement**

(Number of foundations that identified their use of strategy in parenthesis)

**Grantmaking (19)**

**Advocacy and grassroots organizing (19)** – includes grantmaking to local, regional, or national nonprofit organizations working on advocacy within their particular area of interest, grassroots organizing, community-building, and other advocacy within their particular area of interest, grassroots organizing, community-building, and other advocacy strategies.

**Research (14)** – includes grantmaking to think tanks, nonprofit research institutes, and universities to conduct specific policy research projects, write position papers, collect data, and conduct public policy analysis.

**Working with stakeholders, experts, and partners (16)**

**Convenings (13)** – includes workshops, seminars, community forums and other forms of gatherings that include grantees, nonprofits, community groups, policymakers, and other funders.

**Partnerships/networks (15)** – includes participation in affinity groups, funding partnerships, and other foundation and nonprofit networks.

**Informing and educating (16)**

**Communications (12)** – includes media campaigns, publications, websites, blogs and other Internet 2.0 tools, public relations, press releases, and other general communications activities.

**Policymaker education (7)** – includes direct education to policymakers on specific public problems through publications, data analysis, and policy analysis.

**Foundation cache and expertise (9)** – includes meetings and relationship building with public officials and policymakers, providing public testimony, and utilizing the foundation's cache as a knowledgeable resource on the policy areas of interest.

The overall sense one gets from observing and documenting Skillman's attempt to influence policy and system change is positive and ambitious. In the words of the Chief Operating Officer and Senior Program Officer, "We are out to recast Detroit's reputation from 'dysfunctional' to a city with the infrastructure and capacity to grow and inspire changes for our children."

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## VI. ORGANIZATIONAL LEARNING at The Skillman Foundation

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*Marilyn J. Darling & Jillaine S. Smith*

### I. OVERVIEW

#### **Purpose**

Brandeis contracted with Signet Research and Consulting (Signet) to evaluate how the Skillman Foundation's work practices and culture, and its relationship with its core intermediaries, supports the foundation's aspiration to be a high performance learning organization.

#### **Key Research Questions**

1. To what extent has the culture of the Foundation as a learning organization led to high performance and supported new ways of working?
2. To what extent is evaluation used by the Foundation as a learning and management tool?
3. What practices should be continued and/or improved to support attainment of the 2016 goals?

#### **Methods and Limitations**

SRC's evaluation protocol included a review of internal and external materials, a brief survey and a number of interviews.

##### *Materials review*

SRC reviewed internal and external documents to understand the context inside of which Skillman seeks to be a learning organization. Internal documents included previous evaluations, strategy memos, evaluation team memos to the Foundation, requests for proposals and the evaluation framework. External documents included a range of published articles about organizational learning and philanthropy. A full list of documents and publications is included in the Appendix.

##### *Survey*

An email survey was sent out to a cross-section of 12 Skillman staff and one trustee. Eight program staff returned the survey.

##### *Interviews*

We conducted sixteen interviews of 30-60 minutes each, in person and by phone, with staff levels ranging from the President/CEO to program associates, and including program and non-program staff and consultants. (See Appendix A for a list of persons interviewed.)

##### *Limitations*

Excluded from the scope of this evaluation was any examination of:

- Program meetings in action;
  - Learning within non-programmatic areas of the Foundation's work;
  - Learning-related interactions between program and non-program areas;
  - Learning practices in the field—whether within intermediaries, grantee or partner organizations;
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- How grantee or partner organizations are affected by or affect the learning practices within Skillman’s program areas;
- The role of Data Driven Detroit in the Skillman learning practices or strategy development.

The following report offers our findings and recommendations related to the three evaluation questions. Appendices include a list of materials reviewed and references and headline observations from the GrantCraft Organizational Learning Survey.

## II. FINDINGS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

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### **Question 1: To what extent has the culture of the Foundation as a learning organization led to high performance and supported new ways of working?**

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#### **Context**

The first definition of a learning organization offered by Peter Senge in his seminal 1990 book, *The Fifth Discipline*, was this: “an organization that is continually expanding its capacity to create its future.” (Senge, 1990) More recently, Grantmakers for Effective Organizations defined organizational learning as “the process of asking and answering questions that grantmakers and nonprofits need to understand to improve their performance and achieve better results.” (GEO, 2009)

Organizational learning within the field of philanthropy remains in its infancy. Of the 50 percent of foundations that engage in formal evaluation (just one tool to support learning), GEO’s research found that most still use evaluation for grantee accountability, not for learning and improvement.

The Skillman Foundation can count itself among the even fewer organizations that make organizational learning a priority, taking its place with such pioneers as the Lumina Foundation for Education, the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation and the David and Lucile Packard Foundation.

As one of the evaluators found in a recent study of grantmaking learning practices (Darling, 2010), all pioneers in philanthropic organizational learning struggle to translate commitment and intention into sustained practice that results in improved grantmaking. None have found a silver bullet or even a set of “best” practices. One could say that the field of organizational learning is itself still learning. We commend the Skillman Foundation’s commitment not only to being a learning organization but in choosing to evaluate that learning.

#### **Skillman’s Definitions of a “Learning Organization”**

First and foremost, Skillman’s leadership recognizes and discusses the power of learning to strengthen outcomes. Skillman’s staff and partners report a high opinion of the vision and leadership of the Foundation. That **leaders** of the Foundation have made learning a priority is evident in the quality of definitions we heard from staff, which are generally richer than what we hear among staff at other foundations.

Skillman’s program staff members said that a learning organization:

- “continuously looks at its policies and practices and results and makes changes”
  - “acts as a team in alignment to do whatever it takes to get the job done”
  - “is thoughtful, data-driven, and has rapid feedback loops”
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- “communicates well internally and externally”
- “takes time to reflect, interpret and make adjustments along the way”
- “understands when it’s headed in the right direction and being able to accelerate; and knows when it’s headed in the wrong direction and is able to talk about it openly and honestly”

Our interview sample outside of program was small, but it did appear to us that understanding and acceptance of organizational learning on the administrative side may be quite different. The administrative staff may tend to define learning primarily as a professional development activity. “Organizational learning” – and specifically use of the Evaluation Framework – may be perceived as a “program thing.” We heard that program tends to get the priority, and there may be a tension between program and administration that the leaders of the organization try to avoid. This might interfere with the candid exchange of ideas that creates a true learning organization.

Also, the need to present strong, positive image to key stakeholders and serve as a motivating force in Detroit’s communities may at times come into conflict with the need to make hard decisions and reflect openly in a learningful way with the external world – not an uncommon problem in philanthropy.

### ***Skillman’s Culture and its Impact on Performance***

The environment in which the Skillman Foundation does its work plays a big role in defining its culture. The compelling and visible need that drives Skillman’s mission in Detroit creates urgency to improve. The Foundation’s public commitment to specific goals by a specific date (2016) builds on that, creating a “stake in the ground” against which to learn. These are both very powerful drivers, the value of which should not be underestimated.

Skillman’s culture was described more than once as a family. People may have arguments, but they maintain strong relationships. Skillman’s culture is described in surveys as open and candid (see Appendix B). While we heard of a few topics that are difficult to discuss – primarily across functional or organizational boundaries – our interviews generally confirmed this openness within the program team.

Skillman’s leaders are described as being willing to take risks. We heard conflicting messages, however: Leaders are responsive and willing to change direction if something is not working. But we also heard that decisions are slow to be made, especially when it means narrowing focus, and when there is not time to reflect, changes in course do not happen as quickly as they should. Probably both of these descriptions are true, in different situations.

An indicator of the ability of the Foundation to navigate challenges in the past year: staying on course during the President’s temporary absence, and the transition of senior leadership in one of the partner organizations.

### **The Pace of Work**

We heard that Foundation leadership holds high expectations for staff, and staff members meet those expectations. This helps create the high-performing organization that is Skillman. It encourages leaders to ask even more. And that, we heard, ultimately creates a pace that is unsustainable:

“The pace is such that there’s no time for deep thinking.”

“The extraordinary pace undermines execution.”

“Pace creates an environment where the family doesn’t talk to each other.”

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The highest performing learning organizations Signet has observed have a common characteristic: staff at all levels understand not just what decisions leaders have made, but they understand why they made them. Understanding the thinking behind leadership decisions helps staff make solid decisions of their own with confidence when facing unprecedented or unpredictable situations. And their ability to make those decisions and to explain their reasoning raises the confidence of organizational leaders in return. It creates a virtuous cycle where the whole system is aligned and prepared to perform in complex and changing situations. This could also be described as “developing bench strength,” but it has short, medium and long-term benefits:

- Short-term: Faster decision-making and less reliance on senior leaders
- Medium-term: Ability to work autonomously to move more quickly toward goals
- Long-term: Leadership succession

Skillman’s pace is creating a vicious cycle. From our interviews, we heard that lack of time means that key people are too often inaccessible. Time for reflection is a frequent victim. Priorities may not get decided or communicated in a timely way. (“By the time we hear a decision about goals, we are on to something else.”) We heard that lack of time means, too often, that staff and partners don’t get the opportunity to engage in or understand the thinking of the Foundation, which reduces their ability to take the autonomous, creative action that it will take to achieve the foundation’s 2016 goals, which in turn reinforces dependence on senior leaders.

In our interviews, we heard an intention on the part of leaders to change this pattern, including seeing the transition in the programmatic work of liaisons to executive directors for the governing groups in the neighborhoods as a ripe opportunity to shift leadership to the communities. This also provides an opportunity to shift how the Foundation does its work – introducing more opportunity to reflect and breaking the vicious cycle that this pace creates. We heard what may be an early indicator that this shift is working: one partner described her own experience that the pace was slowing, which is providing more time for reflection and learning.

### ***Alignment and Empowering Staff***

It appears to us that program staff and its leadership understand the importance of building alignment by hashing out thinking and giving staff an opportunity to weigh in on decisions.

When it works, it appears to work well. We were impressed by the work done by the Good Neighborhoods and Good Schools program staff to build alignment of outcomes between differently conceived programs; to “lift up tensions” and learn about them in a safe space. Staff reported that weekly brown bags helped. And for those who participated, the entire process of developing the Evaluation Framework helped build understanding and alignment about Skillman’s outcomes and goals.

We heard that the Senior Program Officers Team meetings provide a rich dialogue about Foundation thinking and some of that gets expressed in other program and cross-organizational meetings.

Nonetheless, we heard a strong message that there is a need to hear more about the thinking behind decisions and to receive more and better guidance to weigh priorities. (“We must be empowered at each level to work and *move*.”) A partner described receiving mixed messages at the point of each big strategic decision. The impacts we heard described were:

- Not feeling empowered to make decisions
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- Having to course-correct because of not receiving information in a timely way, sometimes leading to unnecessary back-peddling
- Not having sufficient confidence in priorities to be able to say no to opportunities and work requests that take attention away from those priorities

### **SUMMARY AND RECOMMENDATIONS**

We want to reiterate that, based on our own anecdotal data, Skillman appears to us to be farther along the continuum toward being “an organization that is continually expanding its capacity to create its future” than the majority of its peer organizations. The understanding staff members display about what it means to be a learning organization and Skillman’s mission-driven culture are a solid platform. The Foundation needs to continue to work on shifting its pace and building a deeper knowledge base to drive its priorities and decisions at all levels.

### **Recommendations**

#### **1. Continue to work on creating a virtuous cycle**

As an overarching goal, strive to have the whole system (Foundation staff, partners, grantees and neighborhoods) aligned and prepared to make good decisions and take effective action in complex and changing conditions. While high standards for achievement have created a pace that is unsustainable, it is not so much that the Foundation should focus on slowing down the pace, but focus on reducing the decision-making bottleneck. *What will it take for staff and partners to become less dependent on senior Foundation leaders to make decisions before they can move forward?*

#### **2. Use the transition to neighborhood governing groups to develop new work practices**

This transition was identified by one foundation leader as an important opportunity to change the way the Foundation works – to shift some leadership responsibilities to neighborhoods and address the issue of pace within the Foundation. We applaud this insight and encourage Foundation leaders and staff to take full advantage of this shift to keep exploring how to empower neighborhoods and, meanwhile, how to work in new ways at the Foundation that creates a more sustainable pace.

#### **3. Get better at sharing thinking in order to actively empower staff**

One critical step in shifting to a virtuous cycle is to get better at sharing the thinking behind decisions. Decision-makers should develop the habit of describing their rationale for a decision: *What does this decision help us to accomplish?* Staff should develop the habit of asking this question when they need better understanding, and should be prepared to answer the question for their own decisions in conversations with senior leaders. If this question can be seen not as a challenge, but as a way to develop understanding, it can become a tool to build alignment, empowerment and knowledge.

#### **4. Use board preparation as a focusing mechanism for strengthening learning and alignment**

In Signet’s recent research report (Darling, 2010), we advocated for finding important “punctuation points” in current work practices and linking learning to those, rather than treating learning activities as a separate ad hoc activity, which is perceived as a distraction by over-committed Foundation staff members.

In Foundations, preparation for board meetings represents a huge, repeated work priority and a huge opportunity to strengthen alignment and learning. The quality of thinking represented in cover memos and other documents the Skillman staff prepares for its board book is the quality of thinking

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that Skillman needs to nurture across the staff. If the reflective dialogue that feeds into this process can be made more deliberate and inclusive, it can contribute to breaking the vicious cycle created by pace, to moving together to achieve the 2016 goals, and, as a very intentional side effect, to building bench strength for the future of the Foundation.

**5. Be deliberate about learning to improve decision-making**

Whenever Foundation leaders find that action has been delayed because a staff member is waiting for a decision from senior staff, or a decision has been made but not communicated effectively, it is an opportunity to reflect and consider: *What would make it possible to make and communicate this kind of decision more effectively in the future? Or... What would it take for this kind of decision to be made by members of our staff in the future?*

**6. Bring administrators into the learning organization conversation**

This evaluation did not provide enough information to give a solid recommendation here, but suggests that it would be worth exploring how to develop a more integrated understanding of organizational learning across the whole Foundation.

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**Question 2: To what extent is evaluation used by the Foundation as a learning and management tool?**

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***Context***

A typical complaint about philanthropic evaluation is that it takes too long to produce overly long reports that aren't seen as useful. The evaluation field is evolving to more work-centric, real-time evaluation models. Both this complaint and efforts to shift the way evaluation is done were evident in our interviews.

***What We Heard***

We heard that evaluation is part of every team, and that people *try* to reflect on reports, though the reality often does not meet the aspiration. We heard that Brandeis' presence in neighborhood meetings is a valuable contribution. ("We don't have to wait for a report.") And we heard that the foundation and its evaluators are working to produce and deliver evaluation data that is useful to the work. One staff member described evaluation as having shifted from comparison to "best practice" toward what the foundation needs to know to achieve its goals. The Evaluation and Learning Team was cited as being inclusive regarding evaluation. Reports do not get thrown at staff. They have the opportunity to weigh in. Finally, Data-Driven Detroit was described as an important investment for the foundation and neighborhoods.

We heard that partners do not have a budget for, and do not participate actively in, ongoing Foundation evaluation, though we did hear that the University of Michigan's Skillman Technical Assistance Center has played a strong role in "breeding a culture of respect" for evaluation among neighborhoods through its technical systems and training, and has used the Evaluation Framework heavily in planning their work and fostering cross-neighborhood learning on common issues.

***Evaluation as a Management Tool***

The Evaluation Framework is a powerful resource that is being used to make decisions. Within the foundation, we heard different levels of engagement, from "everyone is expected to use it to justify

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their work” to “it’s referenced, but not really used” and “I know it’s in a file somewhere.” We believe that this discrepancy is primarily due to staff tenure and role (and hence how involved individuals were in the dialogue that created it).

There is more work to be done. We heard that while there is high alignment on outcomes in the Framework, there remains disagreement regarding measures. Disagreement on measures can mask important misalignments on direction and/or scope. Also, while the evaluation and learning team recognizes the importance of an evolving framework that represents changing thinking based on data, one partner expressed a concern about the evolving nature of the Framework and reticence to use it in its “draft” form with neighborhoods.

We heard that Foundation staff experience a fairly profound tension between the need to stay focused on a few strategic priorities closely tied to the 2016 goals and taking advantage of opportunities to leverage current political and community events to build support for the Foundation’s work. It is an honest dilemma and a difficult trade off. While taking advantage of some of these opportunities can create tremendous leverage in the future, having to drop everything to respond also “untrains” leaders and staff from making the tough decisions about what is needed to really achieve the Foundation’s 2016 goals, and leads staff to wait for guidance before acting, which reinforces the vicious cycle described above.

We believe that the value of evaluation as a management tool is measured in its ability to strengthen future decisions – not just by senior staff, but by everyone in the Foundation and its network of partners, grantees and neighborhoods who face big decisions and small, but important, choices every day.

### **Evaluation as a Learning Tool: Reflection and Pace**

As a result of Signet’s research into grantmaking learning practices, we developed the following illustration of the fundamental cycle that “closes the loop” to produce learning through grantmaking in the short, medium and long-term. Each foundation we have studied has some links that are strong and working well and others that are weak or broken.

Reflection is the point in the learning cycle where meaning gets made that informs future action. Without opportunities to reflect together, the staff of a learning organization “flies blind,” making decisions based on intuition or habit.

More than anything else in the grantmaking learning cycle, people report that Skillman’s pace nearly eliminates the time available to reflect on results and adjust planning and action. Outside of long-term strategy, learning from past lessons is brought into planning “off the top of our head.” Reflection in the annual planning process was described by some as fairly effective, but one person described it as “shallow.” Without appropriate time for reflection, lessons will not get translated into better planning and better action, which will have a big impact, we predict, on the ability of the Foundation and its partners to achieve its goals by 2016.

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It is important to distinguish between course-correcting and learning to improve future performance. We heard that the work on the ground between the program officers, partners and neighborhoods does lead to effective course-correction and learning that is applied to improved action *in those neighborhoods*. But these neighborhood- or school-specific lessons are not being captured in meaningful ways that can support learning to improve future performance throughout the network of grantees and partners, and does not feed back into evaluation. **We asked one program staff: “How well does what gets learned on the ground become accessible knowledge and fed into the foundation’s evaluation process?” Answer: “It doesn’t.” (Note that even some of the most committed “learning organizations” find this to be a challenge. But nonetheless it is worth aiming to improve.)**

We believe that if the pace of the Foundation could be shifted, the staff has the capacity and desire to use evaluation to reflect, learn and grow the knowledge it will take to achieve its 2016 goals.

### **SUMMARY AND RECOMMENDATIONS**

The Foundation’s evaluation practices are shifting in ways that are consistent with best evaluation practices. The fact that neighborhoods are encouraged to do their own evaluation and learning, and are providing the training and support to actually do it, amplifies the value of Skillman’s investment. If Foundation leaders can continue to tackle the fundamental challenges of trading off being strategic vs. opportunistic, and tackle the challenge of pace in order to find precious time for reflection, it will raise the value produced by evaluation for both learning and management.

### **Recommendations**

#### **1. Strive to gain alignment on measures related to 2016 goals**

The next task related to Skillman’s Evaluation Framework is to get better at pushing beyond the aspiration and having what may be a difficult conversation about what it would really look like if you succeeded; acknowledging and talking through different visions, goals and metrics.

This might be as simple as choosing a goal, encouraging staff, partners and grantees to candidly express their own thoughts about what constitutes a measure of success around that goal, and choosing one of your regular meetings to host the kind of dialogue over the course of a few meetings that helped Good Schools and Good Neighborhood program staff to strengthen their alignment.



**2. Think carefully about the trade-off between being opportunistic and building greater focus**

The leadership team should consider how opportunism supports/impedes long-term success and strive to find the right balance. Consider conducting a review of some opportunistic moves Skillman leaders have chosen to make in the past year: *Given what you anticipated, how well did it contribute to your progress? Can you develop some criteria to help decide if future opportunities like this are worth shifting priorities?*

**3. Find and preserve time for reflection and conclude with agreements about decisions and actions**

Strive to develop a “fit-for-purpose” approach to reflection. Annual planning may require a more deliberate and intensive approach to getting the quality of deep insight that will best serve the planning process. But debriefs of regular activities might require no more than a few minutes – enough to articulate one or two useful insights to take forward.

There are several creative ways to adapt the reflection process that we can discuss in person. Creative approaches will be especially important during the (admittedly busy) meetings devoted to preparing for Board meetings. *How could reflecting even briefly on lessons learned related to topics coming before the Board help both strengthen the Board Book and also foster deeper knowledge across the staff?*

It is worth considering why so many important meetings need to be cancelled because one busy person cannot attend. Are there times when these meetings should be held regardless, maybe with a focus on reflecting on lessons learned, reporting insights to missing staff in a subsequent meeting?

**4. Get better at making lessons learned on the ground more broadly available**

Most organizations struggle with growing useful knowledge through sharing lessons learned because they can seem random and often irrelevant to current work. Surfacing and sharing learning priorities (see Question 3 recommendations) can help organize the process of growing useful knowledge across the Foundation and its partners. Ideas about how to do this will be offered as part of developing a practical knowledge management plan.

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**Question 3: What practices should be continued and/or improved to support attainment of the 2016 goals?**

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**Context**

Too many learning initiatives introduce new processes or programs that effectively take people’s attention away from their mission-critical work, with all sorts of unintended consequences. The most powerful way to improve learning is to focus on making small improvements in regular work. Skillman has already begun to tackle some information flow improvements related to its work – making Board Book preparation more efficient and improving the Grants Management system. Like many foundations, so much of Skillman’s work gets done in meetings that it warrants focusing on improving practices here.

***Skillman’s Current Meeting Practices***

In our interviews, we heard about the value produced by meetings: the candid exchanges during Senior Program Officer Team meetings, and quarterly Neighborhood Lunch & Learns with grantees and partners; the monthly Learning Partnership meetings (which, we heard, have become better organized

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based on partner feedback); the Learning Community meetings around a particular topic with staff, grantees and stakeholders.

We heard that setting aside Mondays for internal meetings is a very important vehicle for information flow and tacit knowledge exchange. Some of these meetings generate real breakthroughs in thinking. This is where work is seen holistically.

But we also heard a number of complaints about meetings. Some staff felt that too much time was spent on reporting out and sometimes the information shared was redundant. Meetings frequently lack agendas or veer off focus. One person observed that meetings are not documented well. Another person observed that it is too easy to think that people are in alignment, but in some meetings, there is no progress because everyone says something different and no decisions are made. Some staff members dominate the discussion and others feel that they don't have a chance to weigh in.

Staff members disagree about how much structure meetings should have. One person observed that the fluid and sometimes redundant conversations build alignment. Another observed that when meetings are well designed and facilitated, the staff is good at reflection. But when they are fluid and redundant, there is not enough time available for the most frequently requested meeting activity: reflection on what's being learned through the work.

One person observed that what does not happen often or well enough is meetings to debrief after action in order to coordinate future execution. Finally, staff complained about meetings being cancelled too often when senior staff members are unavailable, which exacerbates the vicious cycle created by the Foundation's pace.

There is clearly value being created from how Skillman conducts its meetings today. There is a time for open, intuitive "follow your nose" dialogue and a time to be more rigorous. Both add value and the lack of the latter is felt by the organization. Skillman's challenge is to figure out which path to take for what kinds of meetings and what kinds of outcomes.

There is also more work to be done to improve information flow and knowledge sharing. Some information flow improvements might help to reduce unnecessary redundancy in meetings and make time for more sharing of leadership thinking and reflecting together on lessons learned.

### ***Identifying Learning Priorities***

The context in which foundations operate is extremely complex and fluid. In the same way that there is too much to do, there is quite literally too much to learn. In Signet's research, we have observed that foundations can perform all of the right "learning organization" practices, but without a clear focus for its learning, they may not produce high performance or move the impact needle.

We heard that the most deliberate learning tends to happen after a bump in the road. This is not uncommon, and a useful place to start. But the quality of learning that emerges from such reflection tends to be reactive – how can we not make that mistake in the future? The more powerful question is: How can we get better at predicting bumps in the road before we hit them? This requires a fundamental shift in the way the Foundation thinks about learning from experience.

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## **SUMMARY AND RECOMMENDATIONS**

There is much good work to be preserved, and there are gaps to be filled. Even carving out 5-10% of the time spent in meetings to better articulate the thinking behind leadership decisions and to reflect on lessons emerging from work would be felt, we believe, to be a big improvement by Foundation staff. If that reflection were driven by a focused learning agenda, it would contribute more quickly to greater knowledge and improved practice.

### **Recommendations**

#### **1. Improve basic meeting management**

Rather than attempting to make a blanket change to the way meetings are conducted, we would recommend that Foundation staff members think about the purpose and strengths and weaknesses of each kind of meeting: *When should staff preserve the open dialogue that is so valuable and when should meetings be more structured, so that more voices can be heard, leaders can share their thinking, and there is time for a different quality of reflective conversation?*

#### **2. Develop an effective and efficient debriefing methodology**

Foundations (and many other kinds of organizations) tend to make this process too large and cumbersome. Consider adopting the simple technique of conducting Before and After Action Reviews to improve learning from discrete experiences. (For more information, see a description in "A Compass in the Woods".)

#### **3. Improve information flow in the context of supporting meetings**

We would encourage the Foundation to better understand what meetings need to accomplish and how to improve them first, and then to tackle the question of what information is needed when, and what information flow could be managed outside of meetings using technology improvements. As part of a separate project to help Skillman Foundation develop a Knowledge Management plan, we compiled a list of the kinds of information identified in the course of our interviews as needed by Foundation staff. These included:

- Who the major players are and their priorities
- Fast-breaking news on policy changes
- Media clips to track the political landscape
- The "Voice of the Community" (hearing and respecting residents' perspectives)
- Granular data for each neighborhood related to 2016 goals
- Status of development and planning for each governing body
- Better impact data to evaluate the value of investments

#### **4. Develop a learning strategy to match the Foundation's strategic plan**

*Just as Skillman is working to hone its strategic focus in order to achieve its 2016 goals, the biggest improvement the Foundation and its partners could make in its learning practices is to hone its learning focus. What does the Foundation most need to focus on learning in order to achieve its 2016 goals?*

Each "node" in the network of players that have a role in turning Skillman's 2016 goals into reality will face unique implementation challenges over the next five years (Foundation board and staff, partners, grantees, neighborhoods, state and local government officials, etc.). We would encourage the Foundation to help each willing party to develop a learning agenda that identifies their biggest

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anticipated challenges, turns them into learning priorities, and lays out a simple plan to learn through the work itself and grow and share knowledge with the larger network.

This kind of focus amplifies the benefit of doing short debriefs or more extended reflection after either successes or failures. *Did we do what we said we were going to do? Did it work? What does this tell us about our thinking? What do we learn from this that we can apply to future work?*

