



**Reflections on
Initiative-based
Grantmaking**

T H E C O L O R A D O T R U S T



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The Colorado Trust

The Colorado Trust is a private grantmaking foundation dedicated to the health and well-being of the people of Colorado. To fulfill its mission, the foundation supports innovative projects, conducts studies, develops services and provides education to produce long-lasting benefits for all Coloradans. Within the framework of human development, The Trust advances accessible and affordable health care programs and the strengthening of families.



Reflections on Initiative-based Grantmaking



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INTRODUCTION

In 1985, The Colorado Trust was established through the sale of Presbyterian-St Luke's Medical Center to a private interest. For its first seven years, The Colorado Trust accepted unsolicited proposals addressing overall health-care improvement. Following a board-directed "scan" in the early 1990s of issues affecting the health and well-being of citizens around the state, The Colorado Trust changed its funding strategies. Beginning in 1992, the foundation instituted an initiative approach to grantmaking, inviting groups through a request-for-proposal process to address specific issues. The foundation believes this proactive approach to grantmaking is more effective in achieving desired outcomes.

The first of its initiatives focused on developing community capacity as a way of improving community health. The **Colorado Healthy Communities Initiative**, for example, was designed to engage a broad cross-section of community interest groups in planning and implementing actions to address local health issues. Three years later, The Colorado Trust began developing initiatives around community-based organizations rather than communities as a whole. These organization-based initiatives had the common objective of addressing community needs by expanding an organization's services. The **Volunteers for Rural Seniors Initiative**, for example, helped strengthen agencies using volunteers to assist seniors in order to enable seniors to remain living in their homes.

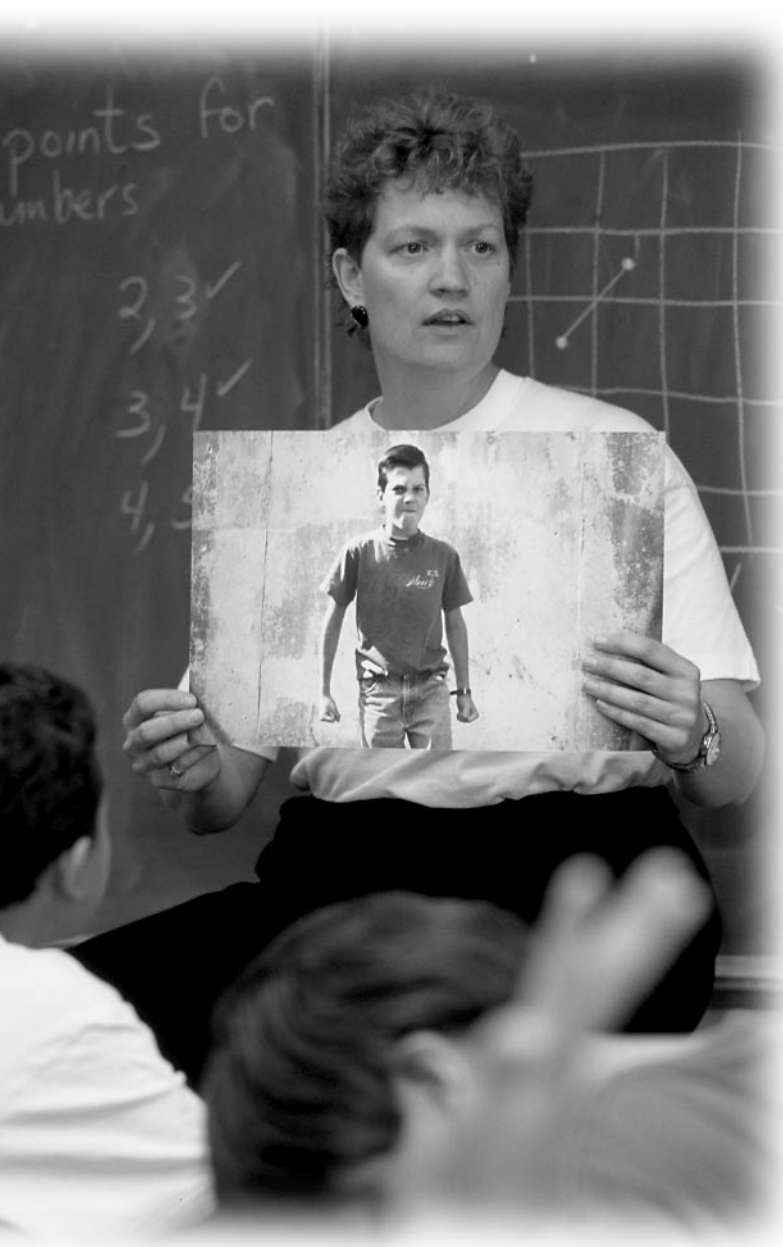
Across all of its initiatives, staff of The Colorado Trust work in close partnership with grantees to learn as the process unfolds. *Reflections on Initiative-based Grantmaking* shares what The Colorado Trust has

learned from its grantmaking process in relation to five initiatives that spanned much of the 1990s. The information in this publication comes from grantee, consultant and staff experiences and observations. It describes what has worked well in the initiatives, what has needed improvement and what changes The Colorado Trust has made or is making to bring about the desired results in its initiative-style of grantmaking.

Because the structure of each of The Colorado Trust's initiatives is designed to maximize learning, with built-in opportunities to adjust or fine-tune the process, how its initiatives unfold is as significant as how they address the issues at hand. What is learned through the process improves the design of future initiatives.

Reflections on Initiative-based Grantmaking is separate from an evaluation report on the five highlighted initiatives. Many of these learnings, however, have been validated by external evaluators who are contracted to examine how well the initiatives achieve their objectives. Together, the informal and formal lessons are important to the understanding and improvement of The Colorado Trust's initiative process.

Through an ongoing application of lessons learned, each new initiative developed by The Colorado Trust builds on the strengths associated with its prior initiatives. As The Colorado Trust continues to evolve, it is committed to sharing and disseminating its findings with those who are interested in learning from or replicating the foundation's initiative-based approach to grantmaking.



THE FIVE INITIATIVES

Colorado Healthy Communities Initiative, 1992–2000

The Colorado Healthy Communities Initiative supported 28 communities in completing a one-year planning process followed by a two-year implementation stage. The \$8.8 million initiative was designed to increase the capacity of communities to solve their own problems through a collaborative, consensus-based approach. The managing agent was the National Civic League. Ross Conner, Ph.D., of the University of California-Irvine, conducted the evaluation. Funding also supported the Colorado Center for Healthy Communities, which was established to facilitate networking among and sustainability for the participating communities.

Teen Pregnancy Prevention 2000 Initiative, 1993–1998

The Teen Pregnancy Prevention Initiative involved five community-based grantees in a consensus-based approach to identifying specific actions addressing teen pregnancy prevention. Additionally, a case-management component targeted already pregnant and parenting teens to improve pregnancy outcomes and reduce subsequent pregnancies. The \$7.7 million Teen Pregnancy Prevention Initiative had no managing agent; The Colorado Trust program staff administered the initiative. Kaia Gallagher, Ph.D., with the Center for Research Strategies, conducted the evaluation.

Community Action for Health Promotion Initiative, 1995–2000

Community Action for Health Promotion, a \$4.1 million initiative, was designed to increase local health promotion activities and to build the capacity of Colorado communities to identify and address preventable health problems. The initiative, managed by Colorado Action for Healthy People, provided more than 50 communities with three-year, \$10,000 seed grants and technical assistance to address specific Healthy People 2000 goals—including violence prevention, adolescent health, childhood injury prevention, healthy habits, heart disease, and tobacco use. Deb Main, Ph.D., with the University of Colorado Health Sciences Center, conducted the evaluation.

Colorado Violence Prevention Initiative, 1995–2000

The \$6.2 million Colorado Violence Prevention Initiative supported violence prevention planning and implementation grants to communities throughout Colorado. Communities were able to apply for implementation-only grants, or planning grants that could lead to implementation grants. In addition, the initiative has supported the Act Against Violence media campaign and efforts of the Rocky Mountain Public Broadcasting System relating to critical TV-viewing skills. The Center for Public-Private Sector Cooperation at the University of Colorado at Denver administered the grants and provided facilitation to the 26 participating communities; technical assistance was provided by the Center for the Study and Prevention of Violence of the University of Colorado-Boulder. Evaluation was overseen by OMNI Research & Training.

Volunteers for Rural Seniors Initiative, 1995–2001

The \$2.9 million Volunteers for Rural Seniors Initiative funds rural projects that support independent living for seniors by creating, expanding or enhancing programs through volunteer-based community service. These services include transportation, delivery of meals, respite care and home repairs. Grants of up to \$25,000 per year have been awarded over a three-year period to 35 rural communities. The Colorado Rural Health Center is the managing agency for this initiative. Dora Lodwick, Ph.D., with the REFT Institute, conducted the evaluation.

CHAPTER ONE PLANNING FOR INITIATIVES

Like a good map, a well-conceived plan saves countless hours of back-tracking.

Planning prior to the start-up of an initiative can be invaluable in defining goals, delineating roles and responsibilities, and establishing working relationships. The planning process can involve a number of different stages: advisory councils can assist in initiative design; initiative management teams can develop the focus of the initiative; communities or organizations can be awarded planning grants that precede implementation funds; and local collaborative planning processes can be required within an initiative to determine strategies and goals. Each method has elicited important learnings for staff of The Colorado Trust.



Internal planning

Initiatives begin with an idea. How the potential idea is generated can come from any number of sources. The Trust's periodic scans of statewide issues affecting health often uncover ideas; current events surfacing in the media and in communities can lead to initiatives; board members make suggestions for staff to look into; and staff-member experiences and learnings from other initiatives can spin off ideas.

Staff members investigate ideas thoroughly before initiatives take form. Through focus groups and interviews with key informants, they gather community input. They also conduct thorough literature reviews, Web-based research, and consultations with experts in the field. The idea for the **Colorado Violence Prevention Initiative**, for example, came from staff discussions of topical issues in the state. Staff explored the issue with nonprofit organizations and foundations and met with key people from around Colorado.

When staff members deem an idea to be substantive for pursuing as an initiative, they approach the board for approval to create an initiative design. Often at this stage a statewide advisory group is formed to provide input to and feedback on the initiative's development. If the board later approves funding for the initiative, staff then begin to convene the initiative team.

Clarifying expectations

The Colorado Trust's initiatives involve many players, from its own initiative staff to the agencies managing the grants, external evaluators, local service providers, facilitators, community advisory boards and grantees. All must be in agreement each step of the way. A consistent approach is essential. To achieve consistency, the roles and expectations of each entity must be made clear and be agreed upon early on in

order to maximize the effectiveness of the initiative.

Over the years, the Colorado Trust has become more involved as an active participant in its initiatives in order to better utilize past learnings.

The **Colorado Violence Prevention Initiative**, launched in 1995, provides an example of the importance of clarifying roles at the outset. The initiative's design included multiple players with distinct roles. The Colorado Trust's role included providing leadership and direction over the initiative. The Center for the Study of Prevention of Violence at the University of Colorado-Boulder provided "state-of-the-science" technical assistance, including risk and resource assessments. The Center for Public-Private Sector Cooperation at the University of Colorado-Denver was employed as the managing agency to respond to grantees' specific needs—ranging from board development to community outreach. OMNI Research and Training was the independent evaluator that assessed how the initiative process unfolded and provided feedback to the initiative team on a monthly basis. The initiative's management team, made up of Trust staff, technical assistance providers, project managers and evaluators, met monthly to assess grantee progress. The complex nature of the initiative, with regard to both the initiative management team and the customer-driven technical assistance approach to the grantees, demanded common understandings of the focus of the initiative and the role of the different agencies.

Because inadequate time was spent during the formation of the initiative for team building, establishing clear and consistent objectives, and refining roles and responsibilities because of the urgency and complexity of the initiative, the initiative team spent a considerable amount of time addressing these matters during the course of the initiative when it had



hoped to be channeling more of its collective energy into grantee services.

The need to build strong working relationships between the multiple players early in any initiative cannot be overemphasized. Each person must feel part of the overall team and be comfortable asking for and relaying information about the initiative's progress to all the others involved. In addition, when the roles and objectives of the initiative are clearly defined, the foundation has a greater assurance that other parties on the team can accurately represent its point of view. This is particularly important so that grantees have the impression that every team member represents the views of The Colorado Trust.

Stakeholder inclusivity and involvement

In many initiatives, The Colorado Trust requires grantees to conduct planning processes to explore and clarify needs within the community. In order to be truly effective, grantee planning committees need to reflect the composition of the communities they serve. All relevant demographics need to be represented, including seniors, youth and those from various ethnic, political, religious and socioeconomic groups. Such collaborations foster new relationships that help create a more functional community where individuals work cooperatively toward the community's well-being.

The Colorado Trust continues to struggle with



inclusivity in its stakeholder groups. To better achieve inclusivity, it employs various strategies to help planning committee members reach out to diverse segments of the population. Often, input from these groups cannot be obtained through traditional meeting settings or written surveys. For example, engaging youth may require moving meetings to their schools and working around class schedules. Some populations respond more effectively to personal contact, such as through neighborhood groups or churches.

Disparities have also become apparent between professional staff who are paid to attend meetings and unpaid volunteers. For example, health-care providers attending community planning meetings can bill their

hours to their employers, while youth who have been recruited to attend are volunteering their time. Creative approaches are necessary to provide incentives to keep volunteers committed. For example, youth involved in the **Volunteers for Rural Seniors Initiative** and the **Colorado Violence Prevention Initiative** were able to earn credit for their volunteer hours when their schools required community service for graduation.

Maintaining stakeholder involvement has been a challenge across initiatives. Planning phases intended to build “community capacity”—the strengths that residents individually or collectively bring to a cause for improving local quality of life—as well as to identify and address problems are time-intensive. The **Colorado Healthy Communities Initiative**, for example, required a year-long, broad-based planning process to examine quality-of-life issues in the community, followed by a two-year implementation phase. Feedback from the grantees revealed that the planning process was too long and, in some cases, led to a lack of continuity as people dropped out of the process. In subsequent community planning phases for other initiatives, The Colorado Trust tried to find a balance between decreasing the length of the planning phase but still allowing sufficient time for planning committee members to build the relationships necessary to arrive at consensus on an action plan.

While the broad scope of the **Colorado Healthy Communities Initiative’s** collaborative process led to widespread community action, the process made it difficult to keep people engaged. The Colorado Trust has found it is easier to motivate stakeholders around specific topic areas. Community members are typically more likely to engage in collaborative efforts involving narrower and more timely issues, such as

reacting to a violent crime or a sudden rise in teen drug use. As a result, allowing flexibility in the length of a planning process has become an important consideration as The Colorado Trust develops new initiative time lines. Communities that have a history of cooperation, inclusivity and trust are less in need of a lengthy planning process before they mobilize to take action than those who have had little experience in working collectively.

The Colorado Trust also found in the **Colorado Healthy Communities Initiative** and the **Teen Pregnancy Prevention 2000 Initiative** that delaying a planning committee's ability to take action until the completion of the planning phase can lead to stakeholder attrition. Allowing groups to act on an issue earlier in the process can empower and affirm their efforts. The Colorado Trust suggested that grantees of the **Colorado Violence Prevention Initiative** limit their planning phase to six months so as to provide grantees the opportunity to move quickly into implementation. In fact, the average time-frame for the grantees' planning process was nine months. Apparently, those grantees who extended their planning process recognized the value gained in extending their planning time line.

Many of the learnings from The Colorado Trust's consensus-based planning initiatives have led the foundation to reconsider requiring community consensus as a prerequisite to its initiatives. Among the repercussions reported by stakeholders in the collaborative process were:

- diluted action plans, as the requirement for consensus limited what actions the group could agree on;
- a proliferation of nonprofit organizations, as planning committee members formed 501(c)(3) organizations to address the issues arrived at through the collaborative process; and
- perceived agendas from the managing agencies, as some planning committee members may have mistrusted the facilitator's neutrality.

With these issues in mind, The Colorado Trust shifted its emphasis to an organizational and content-specific focus when developing the **Colorado Violence Prevention Initiative**. While this does not mean The Colorado Trust will not consider communitywide planning grants in the future, the foundation is becoming more attuned to the strengths and challenges involved with the collaborative model.



CHAPTER TWO IMPLEMENTATION

During project implementation the rewards of strong planning are realized. Conversely, the ramifications of poorly defined roles, missing stakeholders, or poor communication channels become glaringly apparent as the projects now unfold.



The process of rolling out a program with a new or existing organization has also produced a number of learnings for staff at The Colorado Trust. Developing close working relationships, considering the length of its funding cycles, maintaining program flexibility and measuring well-defined objectives head the list.

Team member relations

The best partnerships between The Colorado Trust and the managing agencies are synergistic. With mutual trust and respect between the parties, an initiative's operation can become a partnership, rather than an arrangement in which the foundation sets the direction for the initiative and the agents simply implement it.

Developing a strong working relationship between the different parties involved in an initiative is mandatory. Staff from The Colorado Trust, the managing agency, the grantee organization and the evaluation consultants need to be able to work together through close communication and established roles. The strength of these relationships can have an overriding effect on the initiative as a whole.

To generate the kind of strong collaboration needed, effective leadership needs to take place among and within each entity. In particular, leadership skills involving community building, working with diverse populations, program implementation and promoting a common vision are important.

The Colorado Trust's choice of a managing agency to coordinate its initiatives can lend a higher level of expertise and an expanded network to the project. For example, the managing agency in the **Volunteers for Rural Seniors Initiative**, the Colorado Rural Health Center, is overseen by a board of rural health care professionals. Its staff provides information, educa-

tion, networking opportunities and referrals to address rural health care issues. The center's previously established role in working to improve the health and well-being of rural residents lent credibility to the initiative.

Time frame considerations

Start-up times for The Colorado Trust's initiatives generally need to be extended. The time it takes for a grant-funded program to be up and running is usually longer than originally projected. A slow hiring process, unrealistic expectations and a variety of other factors can lead to implementation delays. The Colorado Trust has found this to be especially so among initiatives in which communities—rather than agencies—are funded, such as the **Colorado Healthy Communities** and **Teen Pregnancy Prevention 2000** initiatives. For example, putting the plans of the community-based coalitions formed in the **Teen Pregnancy Prevention 2000 Initiative** into action was occasionally side-railed while the coalition and the agency administering the grant sorted out their specific roles. Allowing adequate start-up time needs to be a consideration in any project—particularly those resulting from community collaborations.

The extended time needed for projects to get up and running has led The Colorado Trust to extend the length of its granting cycles. Generally speaking, a two-year time frame is too short for initiatives to begin to address issues of sustainability. Grantees of the **Colorado Violence Prevention Initiative**, for example, were awarded two-year grants, but most chose no-cost extensions for another year of implementation.

A minimum of three years is now considered a more realistic time frame for implementing programs.



Flexibility in program design

An inherent tension lies in allowing program flexibility among the grantees and the managing agency and meeting the foundation's and the evaluator's goals for the initiative. Many parties in The Colorado Trust's initiatives—from stakeholders in collaborative

efforts to grantees implementing funded projects—have provided positive feedback regarding the flexibility they were afforded in identifying local solutions to local concerns. Nonetheless, program flexibility can pose challenges for those conducting the evaluation. If the program evolves to the point that it is no longer pursuing the objectives the evaluation set out to measure, the evaluation becomes irrelevant. Having those conducting the evaluation be a part of the initiative team is crucial to enable the evaluation to be flexible, as well, and to follow the direction of the program.

Conversely, some grantees have requested more structure in regard to how to approach implementing their programs. This request surfaced among some of the **Teen Pregnancy Prevention 2000, Colorado**

Healthy Communities, and **Colorado Violence Prevention** initiatives. The Colorado Trust is then faced with how to provide enough structure to help the grantees devise their projects and still keep the process flexible and relevant.

When allowing flexibility in regard to funding action plans, it is also possible for the goals of an initiative to become lost in the process. For example, the community stakeholders in the **Teen Pregnancy Prevention 2000 Initiative**, charged with reaching consensus for community-based strategies for teen pregnancy prevention, often instigated broadly focused projects, such as teen centers and community service programs, that some could argue had only an indirect link to pregnancy prevention.





The Colorado Trust has learned to choose carefully between program flexibility and fidelity to the goals of the initiative. In the **Colorado Violence Prevention Initiative**, grantees were encouraged to try new directions, particularly when adherence to the proposed plan would have yielded only minimal results for violence prevention in the community. Some of the grantees' reasons for altering their course included unanticipated levels of relationship-building needed to mobilize support and finding that original proposals were overly ambitious. This degree of flexibility helped contribute to the creation of viable violence prevention projects that still fell within specific parameters of the initiative.

Measuring objectives

Grant-funded programs need to have both realistic and measurable objectives. The programs need to be driven by well-defined goals that can lead to obtain-

able outcomes. In the **Community Action for Health Promotion Initiative**, the managing agency, Colorado Action for Healthy People, worked closely with grantees designing projects to ensure their goals could be realistically achieved within the three-year time frame and the \$10,000 dollar grant allocation. Some of the grantees requested assistance in finding ways to measure changes or develop measurable objectives.

In the case of the **Teen Pregnancy Prevention Initiative**, emphasis was placed on community coalitions developing targeted, community-based projects, yet more attention could have been placed upon determining whether these projects met specific objectives. Resources and tools must be provided to allow these groups to not only realistically identify objectives, but to also measure outcomes and to discern the results of their efforts.

CHAPTER THREE TECHNICAL ASSISTANCE

Offering technical assistance to grantees is a proactive measure that foundations take to facilitate grantees' success, thereby ensuring their grantmaking dollars are well spent. But technical assistance is not a one-size-fits-all proposition. Both across and within initiatives, grantees may need a wide variety of services. When providing technical assistance, The Colorado Trust attempts to anticipate both the range of needs and the timing for when those needs are best addressed.



Role of the technical assistance provider

The most effective technical assistance providers assume the role of the “friendly expert.” This person must be able to spend time in and learn about the community or organization and to develop trusting relationships with its members. The provider also must be able to communicate effectively and at a level

comfortable for those at the table—lofty language can alienate participants.

Objectivity is important in enabling the technical assistance provider to manage diverse factions. Many of the community collaboratives with the **Colorado Healthy Communities Initiative** attributed their cohesiveness and problem-solving abilities to the objective perspectives of the skilled outside facilitators, who as neutral parties, ensured that all voices were heard.

Menu of services

The nature of the initiative defines the type of technical assistance needed. In the case of the **Volunteers for Rural Seniors Initiative**, for instance, technical assistance provided by the Colorado Rural Health Center was directed specifically at programming related to volunteer assistance for seniors in their homes, such as how to attract, train and retain volunteers.

Still, initiatives can evolve in ways that require more comprehensive technical assistance than expected. In the **Teen Pregnancy Prevention 2000 Initiative**, for example, technical assistance was made available by the University of Colorado at Denver's Center for Public-Private Sector Cooperation to assist with the community collaboration process in each of the five grantee communities. But the grantees were also in need of technical assistance directly related to teen pregnancy prevention programming. The timeliness of the content-specific technical assistance offered to the grantees was also incongruous with the process; content technical assistance was offered too early because, at the time, they were focused on building their community coalitions.

From what it learned from the **Teen Pregnancy**

Prevention 2000 Initiative, The Colorado Trust expanded technical assistance provision in its **Colorado Violence Prevention Initiative** with a two-pronged approach to ensure grantees had access to both organizational effectiveness and information regarding effective violence prevention strategies. The University of Colorado at Denver's Center for Public-Private Sector Cooperation (UCD) provided consultation regarding organizational capacity, while the Center for the Study and Prevention of Violence at the University of Colorado-Boulder (CSPV) offered violence-specific technical assistance to grantees. For example, a grantee in Trinidad, Seniors, Inc., engaged UCD and staff from CSPV to determine the most appropriate way to assess the elder-abuse awareness level in the community. Together, all three developed a survey and designed its implementation; CSPV con-

ducted the analysis.

The Colorado Trust has also found value in making available a menu of technical assistance services to its grantees and allowing grantees to self-assess their needs by determining their strengths and challenges at the outset of an initiative. For example, the University of Colorado at Denver's Center for Public-Private Sector Cooperation provided a "diagnostic checklist" for grantees of the **Colorado Violence Prevention Initiative**, to help them identify the kind of technical assistance they needed.





CHAPTER FOUR NETWORKING

Providing opportunities for grantees within an initiative to come together and network is a practice that has been universally well-received across The Colorado Trust's initiatives. In preparation for these gatherings, The Colorado Trust solicits input from its grantees to determine the needs and expectations of the participants in order to provide the appropriate structure for the meetings.

In considering the meeting's format, the foundation also needs to recognize the initiative's evolution and the associated changes taking place over time. In some cases, grantees may wish to come together to learn state-of-the-science developments from an expert in the field; at other times, they may simply wish to build relationships and share experiences. For example, in the **Community Action for Health Promotion Initiative**, grantees from across the state valued the opportunities to network with each other and share ideas. Many faced similar challenges—such as finding community resources, staying energized, staff turnover and community outreach—and found the networking a good source of inspiration.

Some of the motivations for grantees from particular initiatives to convene included the following:

- Relationship building was important in sites of the **Volunteers for Rural Seniors Initiative** to help grantees find solutions to common problems, such as volunteer recruitment and retention.
- Sharing ideas, issues and concerns helped **Community Action for Healthy Promotion Initiative** grantees to learn what worked and what did not in motivating program participants and sustaining programs.



■ Developing public policy was important to **Colorado Healthy Communities Initiative** grantees who strategized about how policy-making could support healthy communities.

■ Specific technical assistance or training was provided to **Colorado Violence Prevention Initiative** grantees wanting to learn about program evaluation and sustainability.

■ Collaborating on issues such as coordination of services and activities led the five **Teen Pregnancy Prevention Initiative** coordinators to launch a coordinated media campaign to help parents learn how to talk to their teens about volatile issues.

In some cases, grantee networks continue beyond the life of the initiatives. For example, representatives from the 28 funded communities involved in the **Colorado Healthy Communities Initiative** recog-

nized the value of their network and they formalized it by creating a nonprofit organization, the Colorado Center for Healthy Communities, which supports the community members in furthering their capacity to address local issues. A \$900,000 grant from The Colorado Trust to the Colorado Center for Healthy Communities was dispersed by the center as challenge grants to various healthy communities.

CHAPTER FIVE EVALUATION

The Colorado Trust funds an independent evaluation of most of its initiatives to build on the lessons learned from prior initiatives. Because the evaluations focus on The Trust's initiative process, it is important to have an independent, outside evaluator, rather than someone internal to The Trust, to conduct the evaluations. These early evaluations examined how well The Trust met its objectives and how the initiative process could be improved. One finding that emerged among the evaluations of these five initiatives was that evaluation needed to be better integrated into initiatives from their inception.

Integrating evaluation into initiatives

An initiative's evaluation needs to be considered as an integral component of the project, rather than a separate activity occurring alongside it. This level of inclusivity is most readily accomplished when initiative team members at all levels—from the foundation staff to the managing agency to the community stakeholders—are included in the evaluation design and process. Ideally, this level of collaboration allows both

the program staff and the evaluation team to operate under the same “logic model,” or set of assumptions regarding how the initiative can bring about a desired change. These sets of assumptions become the basis for the evaluation questions. When team members collaboratively develop steps intending to lead to the projected outcome, the programs and evaluations can be structured accordingly.

Buy-in to the evaluation plan from the various parties can also create enthusiasm for conducting the evaluation. Otherwise, grantees and others often approach the process with skepticism. By including the managing agency in creating the evaluation design for the **Colorado Violence Prevention Initiative**, for example, the agency staff was able to help demystify the evaluation process and the people behind it for the grantees.

Parameters do need to be considered, however, in relation to when program and evaluation separation should occur. Evaluators must be certain their own actions are not influencing what they are trying to evaluate, just as program staff must remain distant enough not to influence the evaluation results. The earlier these determinations can be made, the better all parties can understand their respective roles.

As with all other initiative team members, an evaluator's personality has an impact on the evaluation process and outcome. The ability of the evaluators to communicate with others is essential. Presenting technical details in a way that the grantees and grantors understand is a requisite skill, as is the ability to remain objective while still showing one cares.

Articulating goals

From the outset, when the initiative team clearly understands what can be expected and what is feasible



from the initiative's evaluation, all team members are better positioned to work together effectively. For example, the evaluations of the **Colorado Healthy Communities** and the **Teen Pregnancy Prevention 2000** initiatives did not set out to measure changes in clients' knowledge, attitudes or behaviors. Rather, they set out to capture the strengths and challenges associated with capacity-building processes, either at the community or organizational level.

The **Teen Pregnancy Prevention 2000 Initiative** evaluation describes the capacity-building process within communities where multiple stakeholders with varying points of view come together, and through a consensus process, define how they would create programs to reduce teen pregnancy. The evaluation assessed only the community-driven process. Changes in client behavior were not measured; rather the focus was on the process of bringing together diverse stakeholders for the purpose of changing client behavior. Factors considered in the evaluation included: who was at the table; did the group grow or decline; was it diverse; and was there a growing sense of understanding about the problem, its causes, and what needs to happen to address it.

Experience has shown that, in such cases, stakeholders need to fully understand that their process—rather than the achievements of their subsequent projects—is the emphasis of the overall evaluation.

In addition, grantee feedback from the **Teen Pregnancy Prevention 2000 Initiative** clearly showed The Colorado Trust the need for an evaluation of the progress and results of the programs initiated from the consensus process. Grantees wanted the evaluations both to inform their work and to demonstrate program effectiveness when seeking additional funding. As a result, The Colorado Trust now provides

assistance in several of its initiatives to help organizations build capacity and skills to conduct their own program evaluations or to work with other evaluators. For example, in the **Colorado Violence Prevention Initiative**, assistance from the Center for Prevention of Violence at the University of Colorado-Boulder (CSPV) was offered to all grantees. Grantees worked with CSPV staff to develop logic models, identify indicators and set up systems to track necessary data.

In the **Teen Pregnancy Prevention 2000 Initiative**, when grantees expressed the need for evaluation assistance, an additional funding opportunity was made available for them to work with independent evaluators for their own program evaluation.

However, in these two cases, local program evaluation assistance often came too late in the grant cycle to be of optimum use for grantees. In the case of the **Teen Pregnancy Prevention 2000 Initiative**, the local evaluation came in the third year of the five-year funding cycle. In the **Colorado Violence Prevention Initiative**, while evaluation assistance was offered from the beginning, it was not emphasized, and it often took grantees a long time to recognize the importance of this resource, thereby minimizing the effect of the technical assistance.

Now, evaluations at The Colorado Trust can focus either on initiative-level evaluation or program-level evaluation. Grantees often work with evaluators to plan an evaluation that will meet their needs for demonstrating program effectiveness from the outset. Making this clear from the start and making sure all the stakeholders understand the reasons for the evaluation—as well as what can be expected at the end—will lead to a smoother process with more value for the grantees.

CHAPTER SIX SUSTAINABILITY

Across all of The Colorado Trust's initiatives, grantees have had to face long-term sustainability challenges. To try to improve the transition grantees face when The Colorado Trust's funds end, the foundation has pursued a variety of strategies, including altering its own grantmaking structure to include

funding and technical assistance for resource development, tailoring an evaluation to meet local needs and gradually decreasing levels of grant distribution. Indeed, creating effective, sustainable programs that improve the health and well-being of people in communities across the state is a major goal of The Colorado Trust and is a measure of how well the initiatives are functioning.

Programs as indispensable

One of the topmost forecasters of a program's sustainability is local recognition that it is indispensable in the community. To gain this status, a number of factors must converge—strong leadership, community collaboration, proven results and the ability to impact an issue important to the community. When local funders regard the initiative's program directors as leaders in their fields, the directors are better able to leverage funding for sustaining their projects.

The five project directors in the **Teen Pregnancy Prevention 2000 Initiative** all filled this role. Each was viewed in the community as a local leader in the field of adolescent pregnancy prevention. Several have been able to sustain the activities initiated during the initiative after the grants ended. Many also played leadership roles on community councils to provide insights and recommendations regarding the needs of pregnant and parenting teens. Since the initiative's conclusion in 1998, some components of the five **Teen Pregnancy Prevention 2000 Initiative** efforts are still in existence today.

Similarly, many of the grantees of the **Colorado Violence Prevention Initiative** have gained status among local funders, and their programs are perceived as critical in addressing violence prevention in the community.



Grantmaking strategies to enhance sustainability

Among the initiatives The Colorado Trust has funded throughout the last decade, those that have been created within existing organizations, such as the **Colorado Violence Prevention** and the **Volunteers for Rural Seniors** initiatives, have been less difficult to sustain than those using a model of community coalitions, such as the **Colorado Healthy Communities** and the **Teen Pregnancy Prevention 2000** initiatives. This is not to say that long-term benefits have not been realized from initiatives centered around community capacity-building, as these have led to successes in the way decisions are made and issues are addressed in local communities. Rather, the new organizations that emerged from these initiatives have had more difficulty in securing additional funding to sustain themselves as they have not had time to become well-established in their communities.

To assist groups in their efforts to sustain the projects instigated through funded initiatives, The Colorado Trust provides its grantees with technical assistance in fund development. In the **Volunteers for Rural Seniors Initiative**, the managing agency helped grantees connect with fundraising workshops, network with other agencies and have access to public relations expertise.

The Colorado Trust also funded a part-time development staff person in the five communities involved in the **Teen Pregnancy Prevention 2000 Initiative**. This strategy yielded only limited success as only a few were able to generate funding for continued programming. Many of the development staff found it difficult to raise funds because of perceptions in the community that The Colorado Trust funding

was still available. In this situation, step-down funding—or a gradual decrease in the amount of funding received during the life of the initiative—may have benefited the programs' fundraising efforts. Full funding up through the final year of the initiative became a barrier to sustainability for the **Teen Pregnancy Prevention 2000 Initiative** grantees. A combination of step-down funding with a funding allocation for a development director could have improved their effectiveness in generating new funding sources.

Requesting matching funds for its grants is another strategy for bolstering sustainability of programs. In the **Colorado Healthy Communities Initiative**, for example, grantees were asked to match their grants dollar-for-dollar with funds from other funding sources. This challenge grant program helped grantees move from a single funding stream to “selling” their projects to other funders.

While The Colorado Trust has not discovered one sure way to insure sustainability of its funded programs, the foundation continues to experiment with grantmaking strategies to increase the likelihood that successful programs will continue.



CONCLUSION

After nearly a decade of experience to draw upon, The Colorado Trust remains committed to the initiative-based form of grantmaking. The Colorado Trust's initiative framework is becoming more standard—inasmuch as the foundation recognizes that all initiatives require planning, team-building, technical assistance, networking and evaluation—but individual initiatives demand their own modifications. Some of these modifications may include use of planning grants before implementation funds or the provision of specific areas of technical assistance. Overall, however, the initiative approach is able to address targeted areas of concern for the health of Coloradans in a framework that can be fine-tuned over time.

As *Reflections on Initiative-based Grantmaking* describes, several adjustments made from one initiative to the next have helped improve the process.

Planning phases for The Colorado Trust's initiatives are becoming streamlined. In the community-wide planning processes, new strategies are helping to increase inclusivity and to retain volunteers. The Colorado Trust has allowed greater flexibility regarding the length of the planning phase for grantees who are ready to act. It has also experimented with planning grants prior to implementation funding as a way to assess the feasibility of a proposed project. In its recent initiatives, The Colorado Trust has moved away from communitywide planning initiatives and focused instead on organizational and issue-specific initiatives.

Learnings derived from the implementation phase point to the need for strong working relationships among team members, an allowance for lengthier start-up times, and extending the length of its granting cycles. The Colorado Trust continues to weigh the need to allow grantees flexibility in implementing

their projects against providing adequate structure to keep them aligned with the goals of the initiative.

Offering technical assistance is a mainstay of The Colorado Trust's initiatives, but to better address the varied needs of its grantees, the foundation is making available both organizational and industry-specific consultation and is experimenting with allowing grantees to pick and choose from a menu of technical assistance services and providers.

In its role of bringing grantees from a particular initiative together for networking purposes, The Colorado Trust has learned to be cognizant of the grantees' specific concerns in relation to their initiative's evolution.

Evaluation of each initiative continues to be conducted by outside consultants, yet more and more the evaluation design is determined with input from the various stakeholders. As evaluators become intrinsic members of an initiative's team, The Colorado Trust is learning how to determine the amount of evaluator and program staff interaction that can support team-building and how much can influence the areas that the evaluators are attempting to track. In addition, technical assistance regarding program evaluation is now offered to grantees who wish to demonstrate their own program's effectiveness.

Finally, The Colorado Trust has identified the need to work with its grantees around issues of sustainability after initiative funding expires. Strategies that The Colorado Trust has identified to support program sustainability include requesting matching funds in grant proposals so grantees become accustomed to pursuing other funding streams, providing technical assistance in fund development, and utilizing step-down funding to gradually decrease the amount of grant dollars over time.



In recent months, The Colorado Trust has embarked on two new initiatives, the **After School Initiative** and the **Supporting Immigrant and Refugee Families Initiative**. Staff applied learnings that directly resulted from the five initiatives examined in this report in the design of the emerging initiatives. For example, grantees of the **Colorado Violence Prevention Initiative** repeatedly voiced the need for technical assistance in the area of sustainability. As a result, all **After School Initiative** grantees will receive this specific technical assistance.

Issues of culture and diversity emerged within the five initiatives. Grantees in the **Colorado Violence**

Prevention Initiative, for example, found that certain topics were unique to rural areas and sensitivity was needed in providing relevant services to rural communities by facilitators with experience in small communities. In other initiatives, communities have desired bilingual and bicultural facilitators. With these specific needs in mind, the coordinating agency selected for the **Supporting Immigrant and Refugee Families Initiative** has bilingual and bicultural staff and consultants able to facilitate, lead trainings and assist with outreach efforts and can provide local or out-of-town facilitators, according to the particular needs of the grantees and the strengths of the consultants.

As The Colorado Trust continues to build on the lessons gleaned from the five initiatives highlighted in this report—and from those initiatives now under way or yet to come—it anticipates applying many more refinements to this dynamic form of grantmaking.



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