

# *New Voices at the Civic Table:*

How six human service organizations are supporting the civic engagement of community members



*“We have to learn how to solve problems.  
We can’t just stand there. We have to speak up.”*

– Community participant in Minneapolis



*The Ultimate  
Agency Advantage*

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The mission of the Alliance for Children and Families is to fuse intellectual capital with superior membership services in order to strengthen the capacities of child- and family serving organizations to serve and advocate for children, families, and communities. In turn, this enables Alliance members to collectively pursue a vision of a healthy society and strong communities for all children and families. Alliance member agencies represent the private, nonprofit human services sector.

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The Alliance for Children and Families is proud to report on *New Voices at the Civic Table*, a pilot project conducted in 2006. The goals of New Voices include informing the human services field on strategies to support civic engagement, and building the capacity of human service agencies to commit to this work. The report is a learning tool and an invitation for dialogue. In the following pages, we examine the experiences of six Alliance for Children and Families member organizations and their efforts to work with community partners to support the civic engagement of their constituent-clients.

The Alliance for Children and Families finds great hope and promise in the outcomes of these six local initiatives. Lives were connected; people became informed on important issues; decision-makers took notice. We also combated the myth that vulnerable/disadvantaged communities do not have the tools or power to effectively engage in the civic process and create change. Indeed, they do. Furthermore, constituent-clients embarked on journeys that would stretch their comfort zones, compel them to speak up, and let them lead the way.

As the human services field grows and changes, so too do expectations around how best to serve constituent-clients. It is not a new idea to say that clients should be more active in directing their own plan for improvement, or that they should have more say in policies that impact them and their families. It is, though, certainly an idea that we as a field need to take more seriously and approach with fervor, as trends point to dips in funding and participation while poverty and isolation persist. There are strategies that human service agencies can employ to help clients become civically engaged, so that attention is also paid to the larger, systemic issues that affect the children and families we serve.

We hope you will take the time to share this report with your staff, board, constituent-clients, and community partners and allow time to deliberate how you can take civic engagement one step further in your organization. Please feel free to contact us at [newvoices@alliance1.org](mailto:newvoices@alliance1.org) with your questions and comments.

In closing, we would like to extend our gratitude to the Rockefeller Brothers Fund and the Carnegie Corporation of New York without whose support this initiative would not be possible. Their commitment to this work has allowed us to explore in depth what it takes to develop an engaged citizenry facilitated by human service organizations. We hope the leadership of the RBF and the Carnegie Corporation continues to inspire the philanthropic community to more actively support civic engagement.

Sincerely,

Peter Goldberg  
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# NEW VOICES at the CIVIC TABLE:

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*Report by:*

Laura Pinsoneault, MS



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# EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

In 2005, the Alliance for Children and Families (Alliance) launched the *New Voices at the Civic Table* (New Voices) initiative with the support of the Rockefeller Brothers Fund and the Carnegie Corporation of New York. New Voices focused on building the capacity of nonprofit human service organizations to support the civic engagement efforts of clients. The Alliance provided technical assistance and mini-grants to six member organizations to implement civic engagement efforts over a seven-month period.

The unique efforts of these six organizations provide the base for further dialogue among Alliance member organizations and other stakeholders about the role and future of civic engagement in the human services field. By September of 2006, more than 460 constituents (individual clients and community members) participated in civic engagement activities—constituents that included recipients of mental health services, persons living with HIV, youth graduates of a recovery program, parents lacking resources for child care, and non-English speaking immigrants.

These six initiatives targeted:

- self-efficacy efforts promoting individual growth of constituents;
- training and support to help constituents identify their own civic interests;
- mobilizing efforts bringing together large numbers of constituents with common policy goals; and
- organizing efforts drawing on intensive training to build core constituent groups interested in making progress on multiple policy issues.

With the support and encouragement of their organizations and community partners, constituents learned how to join public debate and influence the people and institutions making decisions on their behalf. Over seven months, constituents:

- became familiar with the civic process;
- developed strategic advocacy plans;
- learned how to communicate in public settings;
- organized neighborhood meetings;
- met with elected representatives, public officials, and providers; and
- advocated on behalf of their and their families' needs.

More specifically, constituents:

- gained seats on city decision-making bodies, including one city's HIV Planning office and another county's housing board;
- obtained a signed agreement from a state senator to bring forward a bill to increase public benefits and the English as a Second Language (ESL) education budget;
- addressed local media outlets with televised commentary on universal Pre-K and expanded child care programs; and
- took the lead in planning a community-wide advocacy training, where a regional director from the office of the governor was featured as a keynote speaker.

All six participating organizations have continued working with constituents on various civic engagement efforts. At least three organizations launched newly focused programs that came directly out of their New Voices participation.

Three organizations attracted media coverage, and three leveraged additional funds to support their New Voices activities.

The pilot efforts launched by New Voices in 2006 generated useful data for further dialogue on integrating civic engagement efforts within human service organizations. The experiences of constituents and organizations provide additional background for discussions on:

- the meaning of civic engagement for recipients of human services and the organizations that serve them;
- the options for integrating and implementing civic engagement practices within service delivery models; and
- the necessary tools and infrastructure for sustaining viable civic engagement efforts.

As a result of the New Voices efforts, further progress towards integration of civic engagement should center on:

- building a cohesive framework for integrating civic engagement that is consistent with the mission and vision of an organization;
- generating tools that allow organizations to demonstrate the value and effectiveness of civic engagement for constituents and their organization; and
- identifying and securing resources to build the infrastructure for civic engagement efforts.

# INTRODUCTION

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Human service organizations must often negotiate the intersection of service delivery and social policy; each impacts the other, as well as the children and families being served. New challenges face our society, especially for the most vulnerable among us. There have been efforts made by various groups to help community members become more civically engaged, particularly around election time to get out the vote.

The New Voices at the Civic Table (New Voices) initiative, however, is focused upon human service organizations and the longer-term work they do with the clients they serve. New Voices is also distinct from earlier “self-help” initiatives, with the recognition that self-sufficiency requires people to develop the skills to represent their individual *and* shared interests, as well as their capacity to meet their own daily needs. The challenge posed by New Voices is: *How will the human services field and the people it serves find a voice within the civic arena?*

New Voices is part of long-term efforts by the Alliance for Children and Families to promote civic engagement in the human services field and strengthen the voices of constituents. The initiative is grounded in several core assumptions about the civic arena and the human services field:

- public policy decisions affect everyone;
- people have the ability to shape and influence public policy;
- disadvantaged groups do not regularly engage in the democratic process;
- human service organizations, serving primarily disadvantaged groups, can facilitate and encourage civic participation;

- human service organizations, in order to more effectively support civic engagement, require external support in the form of funding, training and expertise; and
- civic engagement is a way of becoming active in the democratic process, including deliberative dialogue, community problem-solving, organizing to affect change, and voting.

These core assumptions suggest that civic engagement is not currently intrinsic to the mission of most human service organizations and, if provided the necessary resources and guidance, that human services should make civic engagement core to its mission and strategic vision. In the long-term, the integration of civic engagement practices in human services should lead to:

- more effective services;
- accountability in the public arena; and
- improved quality of life for recipients of services.

In New Voices’ first phase, the Alliance provided technical assistance and mini-grants to six member organizations to support educating, training, and providing opportunities for constituents to become engaged in the civic process. Each organization designed and implemented projects to boost levels of civic engagement.

In 2006, we documented effective practices and outcomes to inform the future direction of the New Voices initiative. These six pilot efforts provided the data for this report. The report is designed to help engage stakeholders in dialogues about ways to support, build on, and sustain civic engagement efforts in the human services field.

# METHODS

In writing this report, the Alliance research and evaluation services department and project director struggled to reconcile the evaluative nature of civic engagement. After reviewing numerous data sources collected from participatory organizations and constituents, it became clear (from both organization data and constituent interviews) that although traditional civic participation practices such as voting, signing petitions, etc., are measurable, other paths of civic engagement are not as apparent. It is difficult to measure, for example, how organizations and constituents internalize information and education about government and civic awareness.

Our initial assumptions were embedded in the language and methods of traditional program models and drove the initial evaluation design of the project. Later, it was decided that standardized evaluation and model comparison were not viable tools at this stage of the dialogue.

## Data Source and Method of Analysis

Several data sources informed this report, including initial proposals, mid-term and final grant reports, program materials (i.e., training agendas, worksheets and handouts for participants, recruitment flyers, etc.), and semi-structured interviews. Interviews with organization staff and constituents were conducted by the project director pre- and/or post-involvement in the New Voices-funded initiatives. Staff interviews were scheduled for 10 minutes and constituent interviews for 15 minutes, but participants were encouraged to say as much as they felt necessary (see initial interview protocols in Appendix A).

The original intent for these pre-post interviews was to track changes in civic participation behaviors and beliefs among constituents and staff. To increase the number of informants, it was decided prior to the end of the grant cycle to interview individuals who were not interviewed during the pre-interview cycle. Additional questions were added to the post-interview protocols in order to gain greater detail about the potential benefits for constituents and staff as a result of their participation in the efforts.

Interviews did not provide the type of information we initially hoped for, which was to track changes in civic participation behavior, but they did provide important information about the context in which these efforts occurred and what considerations might be important in the design of civic engagement efforts. When reviewing

the data, we asked the following questions at the individual, staff, organization and community level:

- what constitutes civic participation?
- what kinds of civic activities are individuals participating in?
- what are the benefits of civic participation?
- what is the developmental trajectory of civic participation for constituents?
- what do individuals/organizations believe about civic participation?
- what strategies are being used to facilitate civic participation?
- what structures are necessary to initiate/maintain a civic engagement effort? and
- what structures impede/prevent successful civic engagement efforts?

In addition to New Voices' interest in facilitating and encouraging civic participation and engagement, this initiative was also interested in identifying sustainable efforts. Each of the six pilot efforts offered a unique approach to the implementation of civic engagement. Since there were no standardized criteria from which to evaluate initiatives, rather than attempt to privilege any one organizational effort over another, the data were analyzed for both supportive and obstructive conditions and circumstances, as well as characteristics of types of models and strategies that may assist other organizations in selecting civic engagement efforts.

## Organization of Report

In writing the report, an attempt was made to distinguish between two concepts: civic participation and civic engagement. Most often in the literature, these two terms are used interchangeably to describe both the behaviors and internalized personal responsibility behind a civic citizenry. In this report, we generally try to use *civic participation* to refer to behaviors or measurable actions taken in the civic arena (e.g., voting, advocating, marching, protesting, facilitating) and *civic engagement* to reflect an internalized commitment to civic participation focused by knowledge and information (e.g., getting and staying informed, reflection, values and beliefs).

# METHODS

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In order to encourage and support civic engagement efforts and to facilitate information sharing among the national network about integrating civic engagement, the report was organized in the following manner:

**Section One: Civic Engagement Strategies** presents the six pilot initiatives organized around the various mechanisms used to drive civic engagement/participation and the realized and potential outcomes of these initiatives.

**Section Two: A Civically-Oriented Constituency** describes the citizens involved in these efforts with respect to civic engagement/participation experiences before and after involvement in these efforts.

**Section Three: The Human Service Organization** focuses on the civic engagement experiences of staff involved in the efforts, as well as the impacts of these efforts on the organization.

**Section Four: Lessons Learned and Recommendations** reflects on what the data used to inform this report suggests with respect to integration of civic engagement by human services and the next steps in this process.

# SECTION ONE: CIVIC ENGAGEMENT STRATEGIES

New Voices participating organizations chose a service delivery model for integrating civic engagement practices into their work. Regardless of the various models chosen, all six efforts included:

- training and education in leadership, government practices and structures, advocacy and/or communicating needs and wants;
- hands-on opportunities to utilize training and education;
- some form of participatory decision-making;
- building support for individual action;
- opportunities to reflect on what constituents learned and how it can be applied in their daily lives.

Structurally, the six efforts varied with respect to (see Table 1):

- type of program or the programmatic mechanism used to drive civic engagement;
- focus or purpose of program;
- “reservoir of interest” or the motivation of constituents that organizations attempted to tap into to keep constituents engaged;
- premises about civic engagement that guided program model selection.

Although there was overlap among the six pilot projects, four different types of efforts were implemented to guide civic engagement efforts within the agency and among constituents:

- self-efficacy efforts;
- consumer involvement efforts;
- mobilizing efforts; and
- organizing efforts.

This section looks more closely at the six pilot civic engagement strategies and how the programs differ based on: the mechanisms used to drive civic engagement, the program focus, “reservoir of interest,” and the values and beliefs that underlie the project models. It provides a brief synopsis for each of the pilot projects. Additionally, outcome data reported by each organization helps generate the possible impacts on constituents and organizations that might result from the various program models. (The table in Appendix B summarizes additional aspects of the six initiatives and provides contact information for each of the organizations involved in the project.) The distinctions in the following table will be further explained below.

**Table 1**

**New Voices at the Civic Table Strategies**

ORGANIZATION	TYPE OF PROGRAM	FOCUS	RESERVOIR OF INTEREST	PREMISE
Council of Family and Child Caring Agencies, New York, NY	Organizing	Create a group of informed parents skilled in leadership and public speaking on issues	Common Trait & Experience-parents lacking access to adequate child care	Experience generates expertise but requires tools
El Centro, Kansas City, KS	Mobilizing	Address systemic barriers to civic engagement using community members	Common Interest—improving immigrant experience	Systems of inequality leave those most affected outside of the civic arena
Family and Children’s Service, Minneapolis, MN	Organizing	Organize group to identify and problem solve on issues	Common Trait & Experience—Hmong refugee experience in Minnesota	Experience generates expertise but requires tools
Family and Community Service of Delaware Co., Media, PA	Consumer Involvement	Instill values: personal responsibility and participatory decision-making	Common Trait—individuals living with HIV	Persons are responsible for their own civic engagement
Family Services of Western PA, Pittsburgh, PA	Mobilizing	Generate activity on relevant issues	Common Interest—improving mental health services	There is strength in numbers
Turning Point, Ft. Collins, CO	Self-Efficacy	Build connections and define self within community	Shared Experience—recovery	Self-efficacy precedes community involvement

# SECTION ONE: CIVIC ENGAGEMENT STRATEGIES

## Self-Efficacy Efforts

### Case Study: Turning Point Dialogues

*Turning Point Center for Youth and Family Development, Colorado*

The Turning Point Center for Youth and Family Development partnered with the Institute on the Common Good to increase participation in the community of adolescents in residential treatment programs and their supports. The Turning Point Dialogues encouraged youth to further their success in the program by identifying and becoming involved in a community volunteer project. They used dialogue and training to “give a voice” to staff, clients, and families around issues that are salient in their lives and to identify significant social issues to engage youth with their community.

Six dialogues were designed with three overarching goals in mind:

- build a strong support network that cooperates to help the adolescents once they leave the program.
- develop improved, long-term connections and community support for participants, their families, and their community; and
- develop a model that is effective and replicable in other communities.

The Turning Point Dialogues used an intensive recruitment process that involved interviewing constituents and support systems, followed by a series of four dialogues and two “learning journeys,” (i.e., experiential opportunities in the community) as well as ongoing weekly contact with participants. “Learning journeys” and dialogues provided youth with opportunities to work towards a community volunteer project. Throughout the recruitment, training and experiential components, Turning Point staff used weekly, one-to-one contact to build rapport.

*I haven't been in the world for awhile. [Through the dialogues, I] acquired support and everything, [it] introduced me to other kids that want to stay sober. It was cool to be able to meet other people...with the same goal of staying sober.*

-Turning Point participant commenting on the Dialogues

The self-efficacy effort, or efforts helping constituents form a belief that they can influence their own thoughts and behaviors, are aligned with strength-based practice orientations and recovery models. Within the civic engagement framework of New Voices, Turning Point

Center’s self-efficacy effort promoted civic engagement through personal empowerment. Self-efficacy efforts view civic engagement on a continuum that begins with individual progress on personal goals, then viewing oneself as a member of a community by both giving and getting support, to identifying ways one can take participatory action in the “outside world.” This type of initiative requires building a strong support base that encourages positive shared experiences and relationships.

Self-efficacy efforts, like the Turning Point Dialogues, are often difficult to evaluate because of the ups-and-downs experienced by constituents. Additionally, because self-efficacy approaches are based on establishing trust and support, they serve a small number of constituents at any one time and require substantial staff time and resources. The relative costs of self-efficacy efforts may be less obtrusive if an organization’s desired result is additional constituent progress on recovery goals and shifting services to other programs that can meet basic constituent needs (e.g., job training programs).

The Turning Point Dialogues were successful in building group support, positive experiences and personal responsibility. Based on the Turning Point experience, results of self-efficacy efforts for constituents might be seen in:

- changes in attitudes towards self and others;
- sense of belonging;
- increased self-esteem and confidence;
- progress towards personal goals; and
- acceptance of personal responsibility.

In addition, the Turning Point Center also credited the New Voices project with building community partnerships and providing an opportunity to view its practice in a new and innovative way. Based on the reports of Turning Point Center and the other New Voices participants, additional impacts on organizations employing self-efficacy efforts might include:

- better matching of referral services for clients;
- transitioning of clients out of service;
- integration of civic engagement mission with practice models; and
- new and innovative approaches to reengage clients.

# SECTION ONE: CIVIC ENGAGEMENT STRATEGIES

## Constituent Involvement Efforts

### Case Study: New Voices Consumer Organization

*Family and Community Service of Delaware County, Pennsylvania*

Family and Community Service of Delaware County (FCSDC) partnered with the AIDS Consortium of Delaware County (ACDC) in an effort to provide leadership and advocacy training for individuals who are HIV positive in the County and to assist them in identifying opportunities for civic participation. The main objectives of the initiative were to:

- increase the capacity and effectiveness of participants in their public and political lives.
- assist participants in building on their individual and collective assets by implementing an advocacy activity. and
- increase civic participation activities of the HIV/AIDS population in Delaware County.

Through the FCSDC and ACDC initiative, a clinical psychologist (and long-time AIDS activist) was hired to present educational material, co-facilitate a six-week leadership training workshop, and prepare a follow-up session in conjunction with a constituent-client assistant. Topics included building good communication, developing leadership skills, defining advocacy, identifying issues and developing an advocacy plan. A priority for the group was constituent leadership and direction of the process after workshops concluded.

*They allow me to be me. And that's how I got a lot of support. As long as I'm doing something positive, they open doors for me as far as getting involved with New Voices. We talk about things that are really serious. They didn't judge my background. They gave me a chance when nobody else would. And they don't look down at me even one little bit.*

- FCSDC participant describing his involvement in the effort

Constituent involvement efforts, like self-efficacy efforts, build on a common characteristic and the experience of disenfranchisement associated with being a member of a marginalized group. The New Voices Consumer Organization approached civic engagement by encouraging constituent involvement in the organization's services and governing councils. Constituent involvement is not a new effort for service delivery organizations and is often at

the core of funding proposals and grants. However, constituent involvement efforts tied to civic engagement such as the FCSDC effort are unique in that they offer marginal populations opportunities to build confidence and feel a certain level of personal safety before taking action in a public arena. By building success through "safe" participation at a familiar point of service, constituents may be more willing to participate in other settings. Support from individuals dealing with barriers is critical to developing this confidence and, therefore, these efforts also center on creating a small, intimate group of constituents at the start.

Constituent involvement efforts can be measured in terms of numbers of constituents involved in the organization's governing and decision-making bodies, but the broader civic implications of these efforts are more difficult to assess because they require prompting constituents to look at all areas they are involved in outside of the organization, what their role is, and how these efforts are encouraged by the organization's initiatives.

A prime goal of The New Voices Consumer Organization at FCSDC effort was constituent developed and implemented personal advocacy action plans. Constituents provided prevention education, volunteered for leadership roles and attended focus groups and Town Hall meetings. All of the participants agreed to continue with a second round of training. Based on the FCSDC effort, impacts of constituent involvement efforts might be seen in:

- increased self-respect;
- sense that individuals can contribute to the community;
- participation in volunteer activities;
- awareness of community opportunities for engagement;
- increased/expanded social circles; and
- shifts in perspective from individualistic to collective orientation.

For the organization, constituent involvement efforts may result in:

- constituent participation in organization decision-making structures; and
- membership in consortiums that make policy decisions for disadvantaged groups.

# SECTION ONE: CIVIC ENGAGEMENT STRATEGIES

## Mobilizing Efforts

### Case Study: El Centro-Kansas Immigrant Justice Coalition

#### *El Centro, Inc., Kansas*

El Centro and the Kansas Immigrant Justice Coalition partnered on an initiative to modify, expand, and implement a Spanish-language leadership training program to support leaders in the immigrant community. The partnership also supported additional outreach and mobilization for statewide efforts targeting immigration policy reform and to encourage civic participation and voter registration among young adults and new citizens.

The goals of the initiative were to:

- increase civic participation and political power of Latino immigrants in Kansas;
- provide leadership and civic participation opportunities;
- reach out to immigrant communities and build an influential constituency base;
- enhance the capacity of immigrant communities and organizations around the state to engage in civic participation and policy change; and
- develop a replicable model of civic engagement for immigrant populations.

To achieve these goals El Centro completed work on the development of a training program in both Spanish and English, designed outreach materials to register Latino and new citizen voters, hosted workshops and community fundraisers, and supported legislative efforts.

### Case Study: Family Services New Voices At The Civic Table Project

#### *Family Services of Western Pennsylvania*

The Family Services New Voices at the Civic Table project was designed to develop capacity among consumers of mental health services to advocate among state, local and federal officials for support of issues that concern them, such as funding for mental health services. In addition to Family Services of Western Pennsylvania, (FSWP) the Family Services New Voices project linked to two existing Pittsburgh region projects: the Centers of Excellence (COE) project, which represents a multi-year

collaboration of six mental health providers and consumers to promote a recovery model orientation across the mental health system, and the Mental Health Association of Allegheny County, which serves an ongoing mission of advocacy in the mental health field.

The Family Services New Voices project focused on two strategies for civic participation:

- to provide training in advocacy techniques to consumers of mental health services; and
- to organize opportunities for consumers to advocate on mental health services issues that are of particular concern to them.



*Teens in Colorado's Turning Point program engaged in team exercises that built their awareness of their own powerful role within their community.*

The Family Services New Voices project planning process involved the creation of a project committee of consumers and staff involved in the COE collaboration. Its primary responsibilities were to organize training events and advocacy opportunities. The second phase of the project was to conduct a three-and-a half hour workshop on advocacy. The advocacy training and workshop curriculum integrated didactic components with interactive sessions involving staff and consumers focused on the “how-tos” of advocacy in the legislative arena. The final component of the project was to link up with already planned efforts to provide opportunities to utilize advocacy skills and to evaluate this process. Constituents attended two scheduled lobbying days in Harrisburg and met with legislators to discuss mental health issues.

# SECTION ONE: CIVIC ENGAGEMENT STRATEGIES

*We met with our representative. I can talk to him; he seems really nice. He never heard about recovery. A lot of them haven't. Pennsylvania is not even close to being a recovery state. We're going to meet with him again, but we have to wait until the budget is passed.*

- FSWP participant discussing a visit with a legislator

The efforts of El Centro and FSWP are best characterized as mobilizing efforts. Mobilizing efforts are distinct from both the self-efficacy and consumer involvement efforts in that the focus shifts away from the individual to building on common interest to create a large group of people acting in concert on well-defined activities. Both El Centro and the FSWP efforts appeared to be guided by the belief that social policy fails to effectively meet the needs of various groups and policy change requires large groups of individuals speaking to a cause with a single voice. Both the El Centro and FSWP efforts focused on increasing civic participation behaviors (i.e., getting people registered to vote, attending lobbying days, getting naturalized, etc.).

By their nature, mobilizing efforts require large numbers of constituents and measurement of their success is evidenced in number of attendees at events or resolution of systemic barriers that impede civic participation and engagement efforts for constituents. The challenge to these efforts is maintaining momentum when attention turns away from hot issues, or constituents run up against the realities of a legislative agenda that is slow to change.

Both FSWP and El Centro mobilized large numbers of constituents for various civic participation efforts. As a result of participation, constituents in both initiatives reported a better understanding of the civic process. Based on these initiatives, the impacts on constituents involved in mobilizing efforts might manifest themselves in the following ways:

- awareness that lawmakers often suffer from a lack of information on critical policy issues;
- improved public speaking skills;
- a greater understanding of how government works;
- reduction in systemic barriers (i.e., naturalization); and
- attendance at legislative hearings, signatures on petitions, attendance at rallies, etc.

Both organizations also reported public recognition for their efforts. Additional impacts at the organization level associated with mobilizing efforts may include:

- a perception that service providers can provide expertise on policy issues;
- legislation that supports agency services;
- media exposure; and
- constituent base that is willing and able to speak on behalf of organization's efforts.

## Organizing Efforts

### Case Study: Parent Voices Speakers Bureau On Child Care

*Council of Family and Child Caring Agencies, New York*

The Council of Family and Child Caring Agencies (COFCCA) collaborated with the Agenda for Children Tomorrow's (ACT) Informing More Parents Across the Community Together (IMPACT) Family Resource Center to prepare parents in the Bushwick community in New York City to form a child care speakers bureau. The primary goal of the program was to inform and empower, and build skills of a core group of parents to become advocates for quality, affordable child care and add their voices to the current advocacy community.

Several strategies led to the development of Parent Voices, a newly formed organizing committee. Using a bilingual, semi-structured curriculum with experienced facilitators from ACT's IMPACT, along with expert consultants employing simultaneous translation, the collaboration held an orientation and six three-hour training sessions that provided parents with a support network of shared experience, knowledge and awareness of child care issues in the community and the political arena, and opportunities to practice skills through assigned outside activities. A second phase of the pilot project focused on actions which included phone calls to government offices, press engagements, a city-wide rally, and formal induction of the Parent Voices project. Built into this process was a more formalized evaluation that offered participants and staff involved in the project opportunities to reflect on their experience and what they learned.

# SECTION ONE: CIVIC ENGAGEMENT STRATEGIES

## Case Study: New Hmong Voices At The Civic Table

*Family and Children's Service, Minnesota*

The New Hmong Voices at the Civic Table initiative identified a need in northern Minneapolis to create an organized group within the growing Hmong community of refugees. Family and Children's Service and the Southeast Asian Community Council (SEACC) garnered support from several funding agencies to:

- educate new Hmong refugees about government and service systems so that they can work within these systems and advocate on their own behalf;
- provide training to Hmong refugees in the community that strengthens leadership and builds civic participation as well as mobilizes the community to prioritize issues and take action; and
- establish working, mutually-beneficial relationships between community members, public officials and service providers to achieve system change.

The initiative centered on a six-month training program that included weekly two-hour training sessions.

The curriculum employed an “education through experience” model to increase awareness and knowledge about government and nonprofit systems, leadership, community building and community organizing. In addition to weekly training sessions, the group participated in outside community-based activities with advocacy components for issues affecting immigrant families, using these experiences to determine the next steps in their organizing efforts. The constituents applied their leadership skills by hosting and facilitating public forums for government leaders, service providers, the media, and community members.

*Information is strength. It allows me to contribute to the community and help other parents like myself. Now that we have knowledge, we can tap into knowledge. I am not just a parent, but a person who can reach out to other parents so they too can have a voice for themselves.*

-A participant in the Parent Voices Speaker Bureau reflecting on her experiences

Organizing efforts are the most demanding initiatives and involve structured curriculums that are time and resource intensive at their conception. They are distinct from the FSWP and El Centro mobilizing efforts, not only in intensity, but in that both the Parent Voices and New Hmong Voices at the Civic Table projects focused efforts on organizing a community before mobilizing around a specific issue or behavior.

Mobilizing efforts, like FSWP and El Centro, pull together a group of individuals who are interested in a targeted policy issue or civic action and work towards a specific policy activity (i.e., registering voters, speaking before the legislature). The purpose behind organizing efforts is to assist constituents in tapping into their own leadership potential and developing communication skills so that they can work towards policy change on multiple issues that might impact their community.

They start with a group of community members who have the desire to build leadership capacity and to engage other members of their community. Through organizing efforts they learn to translate their own experience to expertise for use in the public arena as evidence and support for policy change.

The impacts of Parent Voices and New Hmong Voices at the Civic Table are measurable in the short-term through the development of a core group of leaders for each project and the connections made with individual members of the community, organizations, and policy makers. In addition to immediate impacts, the nature of these two efforts lend themselves to more long-term impacts like those that might be found in self-efficacy and consumer involvement efforts.

Using the experiences of Parent Voices and New Hmong Voices at the Civic Table, impacts of organizing efforts for constituents might be evident in the following ways:

- an ability to turn experience into expertise and communicate to others at this level;
- speaking the “language” of community organizing;
- acceptance of leadership positions; and
- framing of issues for the collective good.

# SECTION ONE: CIVIC ENGAGEMENT STRATEGIES

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Although the goals in organizing efforts focus first on the goals of the community, benefits to the agencies involved in these initiatives include:

- greater access to constituent defined issues through community outreach;
- increased exposure to constituents;
- being viewed as part of the community rather than an organization that serves a community; and
- solid relationships with experienced advocacy and organizing bodies.

This section focused on the civic engagement strategies used by the six New Voices pilot programs. On the ground, specific curriculum components varied across

program models, but at a conceptual level each organization had to look closely at what they wanted to achieve and why.

Guided by an underlying set of values and beliefs about civic engagement, each of the six programs identified a vehicle for civic engagement and a focus of implementation. Recruitment for the programs centered on a “reservoir of interest” to keep constituents motivated and engaged.

These four constructs: type, focus, “reservoir of interest,” and beliefs are informative tools for selection of civic engagement models and provide one type of framework for examining the integration of civic engagement principals and practices in the human services field.

## SECTION TWO: A CIVICALLY-ORIENTED CONSTITUENCY

Constituents involved with human service organizations are often considered marginalized and lacking the resources (e.g., money, literacy, flexible work schedules) for active civic participation. They are also often viewed as people without the power or voice to be fully and meaningfully civically engaged. Understanding who is being served by human service organizations is critical to integrating and developing civic engagement models that work within organizations. This section examines the constituent base involved in the New Voices initiative and the impacts of civic engagement beliefs and practices on constituents' behaviors and their capacity to be engaged.

### The Constituent Base

Recipients of services can face a multitude of barriers that limit their civic participation and capacity to remain engaged (i.e., poverty, language, discrimination, education, citizenship, substance abuse). At the same time, they bring to the table a breadth of experiences and untapped knowledge about how public policy affects their day-to-day lives. They express concerns not only about what they themselves experience (e.g., violence, joblessness, economic hardship), but also about the global context in which they live.

Across the six pilot efforts, constituents included non-English speaking immigrant groups, youth in recovery, HIV-affected individuals, recipients of mental health services, and parents lacking adequate resources for child care. They experience common barriers to civic participation such as lack of reliable transportation, limited access to information sources and financial pressures related to joblessness and poverty. They also face challenges to developing the capacity to become civically engaged including less formal education, unsure awareness of civic processes, and limited sense of self-efficacy (e.g., belief in one's ability to affect the environment at large).

Through examination of both the structure and evolution of the six program models and ways participants represented themselves in interviews, a distinction emerged among constituents involved in the *New Voices* efforts. One group of constituents primarily talked in terms of *process limitations* (i.e., citizenship, imposed language expectations, access to quality services) and was involved in mobilizing and organizing efforts. The second group of constituents focused on confronting

*personal limitations* (i.e., mental health, physical health, substance abuse) and was involved in the self-efficacy and consumer involvement initiatives. (The constituents involved in the mobilizing effort tended to discuss both process and personal limitations.) The importance of this distinction and its relationship to the integration of civic engagement practices in human services is discussed in a later section of the paper. However, its relevance to understanding the constituent base is in how these two groups talked about their civic participation and engagement and their expectations about being involved in these efforts.

### *Constituents and Process Limitations*

Although the barriers for constituents in the process domain vary, based on their interviews constituents had these three characteristics:

- increased exposure to constituents;
- a belief that civic participation is important;
- active participation in their community; and
- recognition and articulation of tangible steps to take to resolve limitations to participation.

Constituents in this group reported a belief and value in their own civic participation. They articulate a belief that a healthy society stems from the active involvement of its citizenry, and that citizens have a responsibility to make themselves heard. A participant in Parent Voices at the beginning of the initiative stated, "You've got a voice. You make things happen. You can't be afraid. That's how stuff gets done. If you don't let people know what's going on, they won't know how to fix it." A participant in the FSWP effort commented on whether their own civic participation mattered, "Oh, most definitely. One person can make a difference because they can spark...how many others?" Embedded in this "civic belief" is also the idea that individuals shape society through civic participation, and essentially any failure of the system is a result of failed participation. As one FSWP participant stated, "It [civic participation] starts with one person. If you don't get involved, you can't complain."

Aside from a belief that civic participation and civic engagement are important, constituents articulating primarily process limitations, or those involved in mobilizing and organizing efforts, already participate in civic activities.

## SECTION TWO: A CIVICALLY-ORIENTED CONSTITUENCY

These constituents reported active advocacy and involvement in their child's schools, churches, and organizations that unite on a common characteristic (i.e., immigrant status, nationality, ethnicity and/or culture) regardless of whether they viewed these activities as civic participation. Also, those already connected to organizing groups, e.g., Southeast Asian Community Council (SEACC), Agenda for Children Tomorrow's Informing More Parents Across the Community Together project (ACT-IMPACT) were involved in more formally organized civic activities even prior to their involvement in New Voices.

When asked about barriers to civic participation and specific behaviors about their civic involvement, constituents in this group identified the issues, but also focused on concrete ways to resolve these issues. For example, many participants cited transportation as a barrier, but at the same time discussed how they go about addressing this barrier (i.e., giving the location of a bus stop, the name of a relative who they rely upon for transportation, etc.). They also willingly discussed ways to build capacity and participate in the public arena.

A participant in the Minnesota Family and Children's Services (FCS) initiative conveyed in her interview, "[I] want to learn as much as [I] can so [I] can obtain US citizenship so I can vote." This participant made a direct link between a step she needs to take and a resulting impact on her civic participation.

For the constituents in the *process limitations domain*, participation in their organization's initiatives reinforced beliefs and strengthened the building blocks for civic engagement by instilling confidence, and enhancing leadership and communication skills. This brought to the forefront constituents' inherent values, leadership and capacities. Although both mobilizing and organizing efforts provided information about the principles of civic engagement, advocacy, and government; the programs focused on immediate action.

### *Constituents and Personal Limitations*

The distinctions between the constituents articulating *process limitations* and the constituents discussing primarily *personal limitations* inform an understanding of civic engagement in the human services field by highlighting the impact of disenfranchisement or marginalization among recipients of services. Further,

this distinction aids in recognizing how self-efficacy and/or consumer involvement efforts contribute to civic engagement practices by moving constituents from the perspective that civic engagement is a right to civic engagement as *both* a right and a responsibility.

The prime characteristics that distinguished constituents with personal limitations and those involved in the self-efficacy and consumer involvement efforts (as well as several of the FSWP constituents) were:

- a belief that they have not earned the right to participate;
- a belief that one must be fully responsible for oneself before one can give to others; and
- an underdeveloped capacity to see issues outside of their individual interests.

Common among constituents in the self-efficacy and consumer involvement efforts, as well as several of the participants in FSWP's mobilizing effort, was tension in their belief systems over the right to participate in the public arena. By the nature of their involvement with Turning Point and FCS, constituents in both of these efforts were confronting multiple personal barriers including dealings with the legal system and substance abuse issues. When talking about their own civic participation and whether or not it mattered, both groups tended to respond that their prior behavior stripped them of that right and they need to earn a place in society.

As one Turning Point participant stated when asked about whether he believed his own civic participation mattered, "Right now, no. In the future it will. Right now I'm in a treatment facility. I don't have an opinion if I am not following the rules." For this constituent, civic participation means accepting personal responsibility and playing by the rules. In other words, "rule-breakers" can't participate in meaningful ways in the civic process. This notion demonstrates a view of civic engagement as a set of behaviors one is granted rights to as a member of society, rather than a process of being an informed and aware member of society.

In addition to their beliefs about civic participation, constituents focusing their efforts on personal limitations often linked their progress in their own "recovery" with ideas that civic participation and leadership are the result of individual agency. In essence, they saw meeting personal recovery goals as a precursor to giving to others;

## SECTION TWO: A CIVICALLY-ORIENTED CONSTITUENCY



*Involvement in marches and demonstrations at political venues—such as state capitals—is an indicator of civic participation.*

until they obtained a level of personal responsibility they believed they could not effectively participate in volunteer or civic capacities. As one Family and Community Service of Delaware County (FCSDC) participant stated, “Leadership is a personal quality and requires taking care of self first.” This constituent’s view that leadership reflects the person was also shared by the participant in the Turning Point Dialogues. This belief system is mirrored in how constituents in these efforts talked about the personal responsibility service models used by the organizations as well as the program models used to engage constituents in the civic arena.

Another characteristic expressed by these constituents is an awareness of barriers to civic participation and broad social issues (i.e., the economy, national security, etc.). However, they lacked the capacity to articulate the impact of these issues for society as a whole, and rather focused on how the issues limited their own personal growth and civic participation. For example, when framing issues like the economy, these constituents talked in terms of getting themselves a job so they could buy a car as opposed to constituents in the mobilizing and organizing efforts who framed the economy as impacting multiple systems of society. Additionally, these constituents reported awareness of tools to aid in civic participation (i.e., computers, news sources, and transportation) but they were not always able to identify ways to access or utilize them.

Constituents who experience multiple personal limitations look to leadership training and civic engagement efforts for their impact on personal growth first, seeing community involvement as distinct from building individual capacity and self-efficacy. Constituents in self-efficacy and consumer involvement initiatives identify the organization’s role in developing leadership as supporting life skills development and moving people involved to a higher level of functioning so that they can ultimately participate in community.

### New Voices Civic Participation Impacts for Constituents

Regardless of the specific New Voices effort constituents were involved in, constituents commented on a change in established connections with services and organizations, confidence and a sense of empowerment, and an awareness of the political process and structure.

Various efforts offered opportunities for constituents to:

- become familiar with civic processes;
- develop strategic advocacy plans;
- learn to speak in public settings;
- organize neighborhood meetings to discuss issues of concern;
- meet with elected representatives and other public officials; and
- advocate on behalf of their needs and their families needs.

Over the seven months, constituents were able to:

- gain seats on city decision making bodies;
- work with a state senator to bring forward a bill to increase public benefits and the state’s ESL education budget;
- address local media outlets; and
- take the lead in planning a community wide advocacy training.

## SECTION TWO: A CIVICALLY-ORIENTED CONSTITUENCY

The experiences of two constituents serve to capture the impacts of these efforts:

*They really trust me. The first time I testified in Topeka, they trusted me. Their trust really encouraged me. I did well.... All the times we speak to authorities, it helps develop your confidence. You appreciate what you're doing, having an impact in your community.*

- An El Centro participant commenting on the support she received from the organization

*[I] learned about the government structure, what politicians affect...and their roles; neighborhood organizing, talking within the community, having one voice so that everyone can communicate with each other. Mobilizing around one issue to solve it. Ideas about the financial part of things—how the government decides how much money is allocated. Learning about business tax breaks and helping the community find jobs with that lens... [Before, I] didn't see a way to help [myself] or others; now [I have] a vision to help [myself] and others.*

- FCS participant commenting on the organization's support of leadership development

Additionally, constituents continue on their transformation from disenfranchised to engaged with pride in what they accomplished and their ability to move forward. When asked to cite something they were proud of, participants provided these answers:

*I would say, for me, self-development and changing old thoughts and ideas.... I was a rule breaker; now I'm a rule keeper.*

- FCSDC participant

*I'm really proud of [speaking to youth at a high school].... When I talked to these kids, I told them everything, didn't leave anything out. And I got their undivided attention. That was a good feeling for me. I really enjoyed that. I think I can go somewhere with it. I think that could be my niche. I think that's real important.*

- FCSDC participant

# SECTION THREE: THE HUMAN SERVICE ORGANIZATION

Citizenry is the foundation for a civic society. The assumptions behind the New Voices initiative are that:

- human service organizations work as agents to promote, encourage and mobilize disenfranchised constituents;
- these efforts can take multiple forms; and
- there are reciprocal benefits for organizations, the individuals that work in them and the constituents served.

This perspective, that organizations are an agent for civic participation, is not an entirely new idea. Nevertheless, organizations continue to struggle to make concrete the abstract conditions and requirements of civic engagement practices because civic engagement is not necessarily intrinsic to the “service delivery” paradigm.

Looking at the constituent base aids in gaining a greater understanding of who organizations serve through civic engagement practices. The purpose of this section is to take a closer look at where human service organizations stand in terms of capacity to integrate civic participation and/or engagement efforts and to highlight through the experiences of the six New Voices initiatives the benefits and challenges of those efforts.

## The Human Service Organization

The ongoing dialogue in the human services field between balancing community-based and clinical practice was expressed by many of the organization staff interviewed as part of the New Voices project. With pressures to model collaboration, empowerment, and now, civic engagement, human service organizations are expected to work both *for* the community and *with* the community. This expectation is played out through infrastructures that support participatory decision making (i.e., constituents sitting on boards and councils, constituent satisfaction, and responsiveness to constituent feedback), strength-based approaches to service delivery, and the establishment of collaborations and coalitions with other community-based organizations.

Prior to the New Voices initiative, these six organizations had adopted one or more of the following practices to support civic participation and civic engagement efforts among constituents and in the community:

- formation of a staff legislative committee on issues that impact the work of the organization;
- establishment of a board committee to steer organization-wide advocacy efforts;
- organization membership and participation in coalitions and consortiums focused on advocacy on issues relevant to service delivery;
- training of other organizations in leadership, advocacy, and community development; and
- implementation of community-centered programming and strength-based assessment and service models.

All of the organizations that participated in this effort supported the idea that to serve constituents effectively there needs to be at least a minimum level of community-centered service integration. Nevertheless, many of the staff interviewed identified a distinction between their organization’s clinical services and community-oriented programming and the organization’s attempts to bridge this gap. A staff member at Minnesota FCS describes their approach:

*FCS has different opportunities in our programs here to address different levels in a unique way. A lot of agencies just might work on one thing; they just might work on case management or direct service type things, but it’s like we’re doing some of that direct service with therapy, and our FAST program, things like that; and we’re [also] doing the community building, organizing, leadership development work... so it is the whole spectrum. I think, too, that people who are interested can get involved in the agency in a lot of different ways. So we have people that maybe came to our leadership development program, and then ended up in our therapeutic services because something happened in their life, and maybe they might be involved in some kind of organizing thing in their [apartment] complex where they live. There’s a lot of crossover. It’s neat to be able to interact with people in that way. It is really unique.*

Although service delivery models continue to evolve towards integration of clinical and community practice, many of the civic activities of these organizations fall within the realm of traditional issue advocacy and relate directly to the organization’s services. These issues are primarily the domain of executives and management

## SECTION THREE: THE HUMAN SERVICE ORGANIZATION

level employees, and possibly one or two designated staff. Most of the staff interviewed tended to refer to a “go-to” person as someone “in-the-know” about legislative issues. Direct service staff were not always kept up-to-date on agency-wide advocacy efforts. As one staff person at Family and Community Service of Delaware County (FCSDC) commented, “Now that I’m in a management position, I’m much more aware. I get e-mails, advocacy alerts.” The result of designating organization advocacy functions to one or two staff members means these functions and practices are not integrated throughout service delivery. At the same time, it reinforces a traditional perspective that civic engagement is only about policy-related activities.

This traditional civic engagement perspective evident in the distribution of advocacy functions in the organization is also evident in how staff discuss their own civic participation. Many of the staff interviewed framed their own civic participation in terms of their work responsibilities. They articulated a clear tension between their own (personal) civic participation, the values placed upon civic engagement, their responsibility to their client and the financial and time limitations resulting from work within a nonprofit, service-oriented organization. An El Centro staff described the perception of staff civic involvement:

*Obviously, they know that their participation matters, but ... I don't want to say they don't care.... It's kind of like you have a regular job, and then you're asked to do things on top of your regular job... Most of our staff feel like it is out of their job description, so [they] don't.... It's like volunteering your time for your own agency. It doesn't seem like volunteering. It seems like you're working. All my staff have been involved in helping influence or change something. All are very people-oriented. The pay is not that great. The reward is helping other people.*

An FCSDC staff member describes her own civic participation and the tension she experiences between client service and civic participation:

*I vote in local and national elections. I read the paper, watch the news, trying to stay informed. Our executive director constantly sends us advocacy alerts—call your senator. Sometimes you get so involved in your day-to-day with clients that I don't see the bigger picture so I don't always respond to them, but I try to keep well-informed. Definitely participation matters.*

When asked about ways to integrate service and civic participation for staff, she said:

*I don't know. Something like the AIDS Walk. It used to be that there were a lot of clients that participated (busloads). The last few years, I haven't seen a client.... Then I think, well, why am I here? I think there's that tension, too, like the client should be doing this; I want a break. I've worked my 40 hours and I don't want to give up my weekends for a march.*

An agency or individual staff member’s perspective also plays into how programs are framed. An FCS staff member comments on whether or not civic engagement is something that can be trained or learned:

*A part of me feels like it isn't inherent. I feel like it helps to know about how you can affect change, and how important some of these things are. Especially in the local community level—that's something I'm just starting to learn a little bit, like city council people or local representatives or whatever. They make decisions on things that really impact my neighborhood; so I think I have a lot more to learn about that, and I think it's really helpful to people to learn more about those things because if you don't get it, you feel kind of out of it.*

*But then I think, too, that there are differences in terms of like, how much people really care about affecting change outside of their own personal life and personal family. Some people are really committed to that, and others are really not.... And then I think about how people want to go about affecting those changes... I talk to other people, too, who are like saying we shouldn't be doing any direct service. Not just this agency, but in general,... like the change it is creating is on such a small scale. It is insignificant; not as important; we should be working on more political things or legislative things, things like that where change is really happening on a bigger scale and you see the results kind of trickling down.*

*But I think it's important to have a balance. When you have a family in crisis, they need housing or food right then... you can't really say, go to this march and work up with other people. They're really hungry and they need food. I think all those things are important and it takes different people and different agencies to work on some of those things.*

## SECTION THREE: THE HUMAN SERVICE ORGANIZATION

### Human Service Organizations as Agents of Civic Engagement

Each of the six organizations who participated in this effort chose to apply for funding to modify or introduce additional service components that would serve to further constituents' civic engagement. This process allowed organizations to grow services, expand collaborative networks, and increase the recognition and respect of the organization within the community.

Several of the organizations, both those with experience in advocacy and civic engagement and those without, reported that participation in this effort challenged them to think “outside-the-box” in designing a program model that would promote civic engagement. For example, Turning Point, which serves a largely involuntary constituent base, was able to offer youth transitioning out of services an opportunity to take what they've learned at Turning Point in their recovery program and move towards community integration through volunteer opportunities. Organizations like FCSDC and FSWP generated additional constituent interest in their civic engagement initiatives that resulted in more willingness on the part of constituents to participate in leadership opportunities within and outside the organization. For example, many of the federal HIV grants require constituent involvement on consortiums, yet organizations often struggle to identify and maintain a commitment from recipients of services. The educational-support model of FCSDC provided a vehicle for constituents to learn about leadership and experience the benefits of sitting on councils and consortiums as an active participant rather than participant-observer.

In addition to shifting how the organization approaches some of the service delivery, the implementation of these civic engagement efforts required the establishment of collaborations and coalitions. Very few of the participating organizations were staffed with the perfect “know-how” for implementing civic engagement models. Although they may have one or two staff who actively engage in organization legislative functions, the ability to train and motivate constituents around civic engagement

principles is still being learned. The collaborations established during the New Voices project benefited all of the collaborating partners. Service delivery organizations used their well-developed people skills to build rapport and assist constituents in identifying needs while in most cases advocacy and leadership partners provided skilled facilitation and training to offer constituents opportunities to be successful in these efforts. Additionally, many of the organizations reported that these collaborations are designed to be ongoing and mutually supportive in terms of resource commitment. Other partnerships, like the El Centro experience, allow for fee-for-service training and trade-offs of expertise and knowledge outside of traditional service delivery.

The addition of civic engagement programs also garnered public recognition and respect for the work of these six organizations. Over the course of the seven months of implementation, three of the organizations earned media coverage as a result of New Voices efforts, and three of the six were able to leverage additional funds to support New Voices activities. Other organizations reported that their presence at public events and meeting with policy-makers helped promote their organization as experts in service areas relevant to legislation (i.e., mental health). And more importantly, that through constituent-to-community outreach (i.e., going door-to-door talking to community members, personally inviting community members and neighbors to event, etc.), like in FCS' New Hmong Voices at the Civic Table effort, the organization was able to reach out and serve new community members.

The civic engagement efforts implemented by the six organizations involved in this project focused energies on constituents' participation and engagement in the civic arena and minimized changes in infrastructure (i.e., staff time and commitment). However, each of these six organizations demonstrated a familiarity with strength-based approaches to service delivery and made attempts to access community resources to better serve constituents. In the end, organizations who participated in these efforts demonstrated growth with respect to services, collaborative networks, and public perception.

## SECTION FOUR: LESSONS LEARNED AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The New Voices initiative and the data generated as a result of this effort inform the dialogue surrounding civic engagement efforts with the field of human services in a variety of ways. This last section of the report summarizes many of the key lessons learned as a result of this initiative and attempts to provide some direction for the potential integration of civic engagement across Alliance member organizations.

Although the six efforts shared common elements across curriculums, each of the pilot initiatives chose to construct service delivery models that were significantly diverse in terms of constituents served, focus of efforts, and impacts. The breadth of innovation suggests that there are multiple paths to civic engagement and multiple ways to impact constituents. Additionally, it calls for critical reflection on both the meaning of *civic participation* and *civic engagement* for constituents and organizations, as well as how human service organizations approach integration of these efforts. In this report, two distinctions were created that suggest cause for more discussion on the goals and directions for integrating civic engagement efforts. The first distinction was an attempt to differentiate civic participation from civic engagement and the second to contrast system or process limitations with personal limitations.

In the early stages of New Voices, as is typical in the civic engagement literature, the terms civic participation and civic engagement were used interchangeably to reflect the goals of New Voices to engage constituents in the civic process. Throughout the writing of the report, an attempt was made to draw a distinction between these terms. In this report, civic participation is defined as the behaviors or measurable actions taken in the civic arena (i.e., voting, advocating, marching, protesting) whereas civic engagement represents the internalization of these behaviors focused by knowledge and information (i.e., making informed voting decisions, reflecting on role in society, identifying beliefs about your own participation). Both the concepts of civic participation and civic engagement are important in creating a civically health society, and both concepts are reflected in the various pilot models used to meet the stated New Voices objectives and in constituents and staff interviews.

Within this report are several instances of increased civic participation, but what constituents felt they needed from organizations implementing these initiatives and what they saw as impacts of these initiatives—are consistent with a more internalized civic engagement practice. Across the various program models, constituents identified the following as necessary in building their own civic engagement and increasing their civic participation:

- social support from family and friends, and connections through shared experience with others who understand their positions and needs;
- systems and providers that understand their needs as they see them;
- confidence generated through increased knowledge and success in practice;
- access to public arenas and powerbrokers;
- access to civic participation opportunities;
- issue-oriented education;
- encouragement;
- awareness of and access to resources that reduce or eliminate the impact of systemic barriers (i.e., education, job corps); and
- knowledge about government, advocacy and the policy process.

Additionally, interviews with constituents suggest that civic participation leads to more participation, but also greater engagement. For example, constituents can show up to vote at the polls or participate in a march or protest (which many of the constituents had done prior to their involvement with New Voices), but it was the awareness and knowledge gained through these efforts and the opportunities to dialogue that made them more engaged.

The second distinction made in this report was to differentiate constituents based on process limitations (defined in this report as limits in access to information and opportunity due to barriers such as language or citizenship) and personal limitations (i.e., substance abuse, mental health issues).

## SECTION FOUR: LESSONS LEARNED AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Although this distinction was made in order to categorize data about constituents involved in the New Voices effort, it opens the dialogue along two paths.

The first is in determining whether these categories evolved from characteristics of the constituents themselves and their own personal motivations or whether these categories were driven by the nature of the organization and its programming. In either case, an organization needs to take these distinctions under consideration both in determining the civic engagement or participation practices they choose to employ and in how they evaluate the impact of these practices for constituents and the organization.

At a considerably more practical and tangible level, the New Voices initiative was informative with respect to infrastructure for implementing these efforts and tools needed to pursue civic engagement. Across the six pilot sites, the need for external infrastructure through collaborations, as well as internal infrastructure was apparent.

The six pilot sites were largely successful in generating the necessary collaborations and coalitions to support civic engagement efforts, and in all of the cases they reported these experiences as positive. Although many of the organizations engaged in advocacy activities and promoted community building, (with the exception of COFCCA<sup>1</sup>) the organizations involved in the New Voices effort had limited staff with the experience to facilitate the types of education and training used in these efforts. The New Voices initiative suggests that human service organizations have strength in these areas:

- creating connections to constituents who may be interested in mobilizing or organizing for policy efforts;
- capacities for assisting constituents, through service or referral, in addressing barriers to civic participation (i.e., education, transportation, life skills, support systems);
- creating forums for constituents to safely practice new personal skills and open dialogue based on trusting relationships and structured support networks; and
- knowledge of how policy affects service delivery.

Nevertheless, at present, strong coalitions and collaborations are necessary for human service organizations to provide the types of intensive training and leadership required to make the transition from a purely service-delivery model to a civic engagement model.

The external collaborations established through New Voices proved to be beneficial. However, the pilot projects suggest that internal infrastructure is a greater challenge. Participation in New Voices did help staff awareness, but there is clearly still a tension between how staff see their work within the organization and how this impacts their beliefs and values with respect to civic engagement. In addition, staff is acutely aware of the distinction between clinical practice and community-based practice, suggesting that the infusion of civic engagement throughout the agency is a slow process. An alternative for the field to consider is one where the capacities provided by external collaborators are intentionally brought and developed in house.

Another structural lesson learned from the New Voices initiative is linked to both the language and meaning of civic engagement as well as infrastructure: there is no standardized way to evaluate civic engagement strategies that encompasses the full range of civic activities and impacts. All of the six efforts made attempts to track and measure their progress throughout the grant cycle. Mobilizing efforts had the easiest time documenting objective measures of their success through participation and attendance at events. The impacts of self-efficacy, consumer involvement, and organizing efforts were less clear and relied on largely anecdotal reports to document their outcomes. The fact that many of the identified components of civic engagement are challenging to measure (support, encouragement, awareness) coupled with the understanding that civic engagement is a life-long process, makes outcomes of these efforts difficult to track in a standardized fashion and therefore difficult (by traditional standards) to communicate to funders all the benefits of investing in these efforts.

Finally, although the New Voices initiative in its current form proved successful in meeting many of the goals established individually for the six initiatives, all of the above lessons require examination of the assumptions that drove the initial New Voices project.

<sup>1</sup> Five of the agencies served constituents directly. The exception was the Council on Family and Child Caring Agencies (COFCCA), a membership organization focused on using advocacy and education to assist nonprofit members in serving constituents.

## SECTION FOUR: LESSONS LEARNED AND RECOMMENDATIONS

At the direction of the Alliance, organizations were encouraged to approach civic engagement efforts using a program paradigm. Based on what has been learned over the last year, including the multifaceted nature of civic engagement and the resources required to generate civic engagement practices, a program paradigm may not be the best model for civic engagement.

An alternative paradigm may be to view civic engagement practices and strategies as infused throughout the organization in the following ways:

1. via environmental changes (i.e., reading material in native languages of constituents, promotion of community activities and events, materials in usable media that spark interest in civic issues, space for casual dialogue among constituents, posters and

artwork that highlight and reflect the community as well as the credentials of the organization);

2. mission, vision and service design (utilize civic participation language in mission statements and vision, rewrite program and service brochures with civic participation practices in mind, meeting with staff and constituents to strategize and discuss ways civic participation is promoted or encouraged through existing practices); and
3. modeling (participation in community organized events not directly linked to service provision, taking time to talk with constituents about non-service related issues and events, promoting staff civic participation activities not necessarily linked to work roles).

### RECOMMENDATIONS

The anticipated long term benefits underlying the New Voices initiative is that the integration of civic engagement practices with human services will ultimately result in more effective services through and by:

- collaboration and constituent involvement;
- accountability in the public arena; and
- improved quality of life for recipients of service.

Although we are a long way from having evidence to support these outcomes, what was uncovered in this first phase of the initiative provides a base for dialogue that will match civic engagement practices with an organization's overall mission and strategic plan. This report stresses that integrating civic engagement practices is an important decision and human service agencies should consider it seriously. With that in mind, this report suggests these three recommendations in pursuing the infusion of civic engagement practices into human service organizations:

1. build a cohesive framework for integrating civic engagement that is consistent with the mission and vision of the organization; and
2. generate tools that allow organizations to demonstrate the value and effectiveness of civic engagement for constituents and their organization; and
3. assist in identifying and securing partners and resources to build the infrastructure for civic engagement efforts.

Whether or not human service organizations might consider moving toward a form of civic engagement within their organization requires reflecting on their mission, the capacity of their organization, and the ethics involved in mingling constituents' public participation.

In general, organizations might consider analyzing their distinctive role, in the community and with the populations served. It might also be useful to consider the array of services provided by the organization, and the needs addressed by those services as they relate to the larger, systemic issues faced by clients. More broadly, the human services field needs to dialogue about these issues and develop the necessary resources and infrastructure to support this integration to make efforts sustainable and viable.

# APPENDIX A: NEW VOICES INTERVIEW PROTOCOLS

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## NEW VOICES at the CIVIC TABLE STAFF INTERVIEW PROTOCOL

With what strengths-based approaches are you familiar?

What strengths-based instruments do you use routinely in assessment/case planning?

What has the agency done to systematically assess the participants' environment?

When was the last time the agency conducted a community survey of resources?

(If survey was recently conducted, how were results used?)

Do you receive questions from participants about the civic process (where to vote, how to attend meetings to discuss a community problem, who is the person "in charge" of \_\_\_\_\_)?

Have you received training in civic engagement to facilitate your work with participants?

What do you perceive are the barriers to participants' full and active civic engagement?

Are there strategies/remedies you could identify to remove those barriers?

Is this organization equipped with the skills and resources to support participant civic engagement?

Do you feel that your own (civic) participation matters?

# APPENDIX A: NEW VOICES INTERVIEW PROTOCOLS

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## NEW VOICES at the CIVIC TABLE CONSTITUENT INTERVIEW PROTOCOL

How long have you known about/participated in the services/programs of this agency?

Do you know of/participate in the services/programs of other agencies?

Can you communicate comfortably with a staff person of this agency/other agencies?

Can you communicate comfortably with a government official?

Do you know the names of any government officials in your city or state?

Do you have anything in particular to talk to/share with a government official?  
(Would you go talk to or write a letter to that government official?)

Are you registered to vote?

When was the last time you voted?

What neighborhood issues do you discuss with your friends, neighbors, families (safety, laws and rules, housing, health, current events)?

Describe the police presence where you live.

What neighborhood associations/neighborhood watch groups/main street groups are active where you live?

Do you attend any of the above meetings?

Do you have access to transportation?

Do you have access to a computer?

What newspaper do you read most often?  
(What radio station do you listen to the most?)

Which issue(s) most concerns you (whether it be aging, health care, financial stability, children's schools, crime, etc.)?

Do you feel that your own (civic) participation matters?

# APPENDIX B: NEW VOICES INITIATIVE SUMMARY TABLE

Program	Targeted Constituency	Organizing Interest	Arena	Objective(s)	Curriculum and Evaluation	Curriculum Components	Contact
Parent Voices New York	Women with Children	Child Care Reform	Local and State Policy	Develop a core group of informed and empowered parents to advocate for quality, affordable child care	Semi-structured, bilingual curriculum; Informal evaluation opportunity for personal and procedural reflection	Community Orientation; Training Sessions; Organized Action; Sustainability Activities	Edith Holzer, COFCCA, New York, NY 212-929-2626
Family Services New Voices Pennsylvania	Consumers of Mental Health Services	Broad Issues Affecting Mental Health Members	State Policy	Develop capacity among consumers to advocate among state, local and federal officials for support of issues that concern them	Informal curriculum focused on legislative process and MH issues in PA; informal outcome evaluation	Collaborative Planning Process; Advocacy Training; Advocacy Opportunities	Marc Sturgeon, FSWP, Pittsburgh, PA 412-820-2050
Turning Point-CG Colorado	Youth Graduated from Treatment and Recovery Program	Self-efficacy-Recovery	Individual-Local Community	Using a community orientation, develop improved, long-term connections and community support for participants, their families, and their community	Informal curriculum that is driven by consumer-facilitator interaction; informal evaluation	One-to-One Support; Facilitated Dialogues; "Learning Journeys"	Kim Wood, Turning Point, FL Collins, CO 970-221-0999
New Voices Consumer Organization Pennsylvania	Consumers Who Are HIV+	Issues Related to Living with HIV	Local-Community	Provide leadership and advocacy training. Provide support in helping consumers self-identify opportunities for civic engagement	Semi-structured curriculum using outside consultant/semi-formal evaluation that taps into pre-post change	6 Week Training Session (Group meetings)	Pat Lavin, FCSDC, Media, PA 610-566-7540
New Hmong Voices at the Civic Table Minnesota	Hmong Refugees	Broad Issues Affecting Hmong Refugees	Community Level-State Impact	Educate Hmong refugees about government and service systems to promote self-advocacy, strengthen leadership and participation in the community; and build community partnerships	Intensive training session driven in experience; measurable objectives	25-week Training Session; Community Forums	Nhia Lee, FCS, Minneapolis, MN 612-729-0340
Ei Centro Kansas	Immigrants (primarily Spanish Speaking)	Immigrant Policy Reform	State Focus	Develop Spanish-language curriculum and mobilize community on political issues; coalition building	Activity oriented initiative; evaluative component; measurable objectives	Curriculum development; Voter Registration Opportunities; Workshops on issues	Melinda Lewis, Ei Centro, Kansas City, KS 913-677-0100

# NOTES

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