

Case Study No.3

PRINCIPLES FOR EFFECTIVE EDUCATION GRANTMAKING

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Working Together to Achieve Greater Impact: The Donors' Education Collaborative of New York City

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PRINCIPLES FOR EFFECTIVE EDUCATION GRANTMAKING

Discipline & Focus	Knowledge	Resources Linked to Results	Effective Grantees	Engaged Partners	Leverage, Influence & Collaboration	Persistence	Innovation & Constant Learning
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grantmakers^{for}education

Grantmakers for Education's mission is to strengthen philanthropy's capacity to improve educational outcomes for all students. We achieve this mission by:

1. Sharing successful strategies, effective practices and lessons that exemplify responsive and responsible grantmaking in education.
2. Creating venues for funders to build and share knowledge, debate strategies, develop leadership, collaborate and advocate for change.
3. Gathering and interpreting data to illustrate trends, highlight innovative or proven educational approaches and support informed grantmaking.

Grantmakers for Education developed this case study as a reflection and discussion tool. Cases are not intended to serve as endorsements, sources of primary data, or illustrations of successful or unsuccessful grantmaking. In addition, to help make the case a more effective learning tool, it is deliberately written from one foundation's point of view, even though other foundations may have been involved in similar activities or supported the same grantees.

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Case Study Jury

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Ted Lobman, former president—*Stuart Foundation*

Hayes Mizell, former program director—*Edna McConnell Clark Foundation*

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Authors and Contributors

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FOREWORD:

A Roadmap for More Effective Education Philanthropy

The mission of Grantmakers for Education, a diverse national network of over 200 grantmaking organizations, is to strengthen philanthropy's capacity to improve educational outcomes for all students.

In June 2005, we announced eight education grantmaking practices—drawn from the experience and wisdom of our members—that we think lead to results in education. These Principles for Effective Education Grantmaking seek to promote the wisdom, craft and knowledge education funders need to achieve maximum results.

As a complement to the principles, Grantmakers for Education is developing this series of case studies designed to encourage foundation trustees, leaders and program staff to reflect more deeply on what these principles mean for their own grantmaking and how they might be integrated into their efforts.

With the help of a distinguished set of advisors from our field, we have chosen case studies that we believe represent rich, thought-provoking examples of how funders might aspire to use these principles in their education grantmaking. Hindsight is always 20/20, and while we think these cases showcase exemplary efforts in education philanthropy, we also chose them because each sheds light on the careful work a funder must invest to make a grant effective, the challenges that crop up along the way, and the messiness inherent in grantmaking despite the best-laid plans.

In the end, we hope these principles—and the cases that help illuminate them—affirm a set of positive attitudes about the future: philanthropy, done wisely, can contribute solutions to the problems that prevent too many students from learning and achieving.

WORKING TOGETHER TO ACHIEVE GREATER IMPACT:

The Donors' Education Collaborative of New York City

Anne Mackinnon

Introduction

The Donors' Education Collaborative of New York (DEC) began with a scene more typical of politics than philanthropy: five foundation presidents in a room, trying to figure out what to do for a city that had fallen on hard times in the early 1990s.

They investigated specific topics—such as the public hospital system and school governance reform—and sought advice from some of the city's most well-informed voices. What the group of five eventually settled on in late 1994 was more in the nature of a general mandate than a specific plan: The foundations would work together for five years, pooling funds to support a common set of grantees, with the goal of increasing public support for New York City's public schools.

The result: Since the mid-1990s, constituency building and advocacy for better public education have grown steadily in New York City, as organizations dedicated to that work have strengthened their internal capacity and increased their reach, visibility and sophistication. Much of that growth has been fueled by philanthropic dollars from DEC members.

DEC pools both the financial resources and the expertise of its members to advance a complex set of shared grantmaking goals. Since its founding in 1995, 27 foundations and donors have become involved as members, some for the entire duration and others for shorter periods. DEC is scheduled to operate at least through 2007, by which time its grantmaking investments will total nearly \$10 million.

Effective education grantmaking: Leverage, influence and collaboration

Grantmakers for Education's Principles for Effective Education Grantmaking describes the importance of seeking out *leverage, influence and collaboration* to make a difference in education. The depth and range of problems in education often make it difficult for funders to achieve meaningful change when working in isolation. Collaboration among funders may therefore be important (and perhaps even essential) to effective grantmaking in certain areas of school reform. The reasons are many: funders who work together can invest larger sums than most could do on their

own; they can achieve greater value and impact; and they can learn from one another through collaborative analysis and problem solving.

This case study focuses on the early years of DEC, including decisions about governance, strategy, grantees and evaluation, from its creation in late 1994 through 2002. In doing so, this study seeks to illustrate for grantmakers the advantages of collaborating and coordinating with other funders to advance common goals—as well as the very real challenges of blending the diverse philosophies and interests of different foundations into a unified strategy and agenda.

A new grantmaking approach for a school system in turmoil

When DEC was created, New York City's public schools had suffered a series of devastating budget cuts, and the system itself was in a state of turmoil. Responses to these problems from parents and other traditional education constituencies had been scattered and ineffective. DEC founders took that as evidence that they could make a real contribution by helping to draw a new generation of concerned New Yorkers into a network capable of defending and improving the city's public schools.

DEC's grantmaking strategy reflected two complementary theories about how to begin and sustain reform in New York City's public schools:

- First, a pooled grantmaking approach can advance social change in an area that has long resisted reform efforts because it engages a range of foundations, makes available a large pool of funds, and leverages members' interests, influence and knowledge.
- Second, sustainable, systemwide education reform can be achieved by projects that combine policy-change strategies with efforts to build permanent, broad-based constituencies that will advocate for and monitor those strategies.

After an intensive nine-month planning period, the funders participating in DEC chose four community-organizing and advocacy projects to receive substantial support over an anticipated four years. Each project involved at least two nonprofit partner organizations. Eventually, three of the four projects achieved notable success, sometimes in surprising ways, and evolved over time to form the core of DEC's grantmaking.

The idea: Strength in numbers

In New York City in the early 1990s, the brief economic recovery of the late 1980s seemed long past. The city was in deep financial trouble, its municipal agencies struggling to keep up with the demands of a city beset by violence, racial tension and poverty, and its school system underfunded and failing. What, five foundation executives wondered, could their organizations do together to help turn the situation around?

These foundation leaders had been meeting periodically for some time to suggest answers to that question. Participants included Susan Berresford, president of the Ford Foundation; Peter Goldmark, president of the Rockefeller Foundation; Vincent McGee, executive director of the Aaron Diamond Foundation; Hildy Simmons, managing director of JP Morgan Charitable Trust; and Lorie Slutsky, president of The New York Community Trust.

One need, as they saw it, was for greater civic participation in public life—an insight consistent with their own collective impulse to get more involved in improving their home city. Nonprofit and advocacy groups that had once functioned as a voluntary civic infrastructure seemed to have grown ineffectual and silent. New York City’s fiscal crisis and near bankruptcy in the mid-1970s had taken a toll, and the capacity that community groups had once represented—to mobilize neighborhoods, articulate the views of important constituencies and brainstorm solutions to problems—had never been rebuilt.

But what, these leaders further inquired, was the proper role for foundations in all this? That question, complicated in any locality, was especially hard to answer in New York City.

Unlike smaller cities, New York assumes no claim on the obligations of its foundations, nor does it typically seek out their views. And the feeling is mutual: Many foundations headquartered in New York treat the city as a base, not a true home.

The city, many funders had concluded, was too big, too complex, too anomalous to be fertile ground for foundation-sponsored programming. Indeed, of the five foundations in the original group, only three—The New York Community Trust, JP Morgan Charitable Trust and the Aaron Diamond Foundation—made grants in New York as a matter of mission. Ford and Rockefeller defined themselves as international funders, with no explicit commitments to programming in New York.

Despite these inclinations, the five foundation leaders were determined to break the pattern of non-engagement. They wanted to do something for New York but were unsure where should they focus. Their own program interests did not overlap in any single, identifiable place.

To learn more about the areas of need, they commissioned policy papers on specific topics—such as the public hospital system and school governance reform—from some of the city’s most well-informed voices. The papers gave the group a chance to envision how certain strategies would play out over time, but they did not point toward a single policy objective.

What the group of five eventually settled on in late 1994 was more in the nature of a general mandate than a specific plan: The foundations would work together for five years, pooling funds to support a common set of grantees, with the goal of increasing public support for the city’s public schools. And, just as the foundations would work cooperatively, so too would they expect their eventual grantees to collaborate. Donations to the collaborative would be pooled in a donor-advised fund, which The New York Community Trust agreed to manage at no cost.

Combining forces to support a troubled school system

Because foundations do not face the same political and economic pressures that other nonprofit organizations do, they are in a unique position to take action on controversial issues or involve themselves in difficult situations. In early 1995, New York City’s public schools were unquestionably in need of help and support for the following reasons:

- The city and state school budgets had been cut repeatedly over the past few years, forcing layoffs and increasing class sizes to levels unthinkable in the rest of New York state.

- Mayor Rudolph Giuliani, elected in 1993, had unapologetically and very publicly driven Chancellor Ramon Cortines from his post, and the search for a successor seemed likely to drag on.
- The previous September, an asbestos scare had delayed the opening of the entire school system for several weeks.
- Battles over a series of hot-button issues—multicultural and HIV/AIDS curricula, a voucher plan, school uniforms, condom availability, mandatory summer school, violence, crowding—had made the schools feel like a perpetual roller coaster for students, teachers and parents.

Most important, many of the city’s schools were plainly failing, and a succession of chancellors had done little to improve the situation.

For a funder wanting to make a difference in such an environment, a collaborative effort with other foundations offered few disadvantages and some very real advantages. Working together would mean learning to cooperate in a complex and highly politicized arena, yet it would also give grantmakers a chance to put their heads together, share intelligence and perhaps arrive at more carefully considered decisions. They would be able to pool their financial and human resources, including their credibility with constituencies such as political leaders, the press, the business community, nonprofits and other foundations.

Moreover, if criticisms arose, no foundation would have to take the heat alone. This threat was on the minds of some New York City funders in the mid-1990s. In news reports and statements from public officials, the problems of the school system were repeatedly traced to the Ford Foundation and the role it had played in establishing the local governance system more than 25 years before. More recently, in 1991, the Aaron Diamond Foundation had been criticized vociferously in some quarters for putting philanthropic dollars behind a plan by the previous chancellor, Joseph Fernandez, to make condoms available to high school students as part of an HIV/AIDS education program.

Establishing the collaborative’s strategy and guidelines

With all these factors in mind, senior program staff at the five foundations began in the spring of 1995 to puzzle through the actual operations and strategy of the collaborative their leaders had created. At the start, the collaborative structure itself raised some questions. At the Rockefeller Foundation, for example, program staff were not quite sure how to categorize the project. “We didn’t really know what program it fell under,” said Marla Ucelli, who was managing a large portfolio to advance urban school reform. “Was it education, human rights, urban issues? The foundation settled on education and gave it to me.”

At The New York Community Trust, the project was assigned to Jane R. Stern, an attorney and former head of the nonprofit group Advocates for Children, whose work included litigation against the school system and other government agencies on behalf of children. Stern had directed The Trust’s education grantmaking since the late 1980s, with a keen eye for the role of public engagement and advocacy in school reform.

She and colleagues at The Trust set up a donor-advised fund to handle the collaborative's money; more important, she agreed to chair the planning committee as it was getting started. Stern's knowledge of education advocacy and her familiarity with the key players in the field—including those involved with the Campaign for Fiscal Equity—proved crucial.

Janice Petrovich, who represented the Ford Foundation, was new to New York and to grantmaking, having previously served as national executive director of the ASPIRA Association in Washington, D.C.¹ Like all incoming Ford program officers, she had spent her first months on the job preparing a memo on the work she wanted to do. The initiative she planned, Constituency-building for Public School Reform, incorporated four broad elements:

- building collaboration among community organizations;
- establishing a research base to support school change;
- promoting public policies to increase school effectiveness; and
- communicating with the public.

In what Petrovich called a “happy marriage of circumstances,” her program and the underlying research she had conducted to prepare her memo fit well with the intentions of DEC's founders and became the basis for its strategy.

Having been involved in launching the collaborative, Vincent McGee, director of the Aaron Diamond Foundation, chose not to participate regularly in the planning meetings. An early “spend-down” foundation that was drawing down its endowment for grantmaking, Diamond was scheduled to close in 1996 after a planned lifespan of 10 years, during which time it had become known as a source of support for controversial and sometimes speculative work in public education, AIDS research, human rights and the arts. As McGee saw it, a financial commitment to DEC would help to “leave more funders on the ground” after Diamond left the field—an important institutional objective.

Hildy Simmons, another of the five executive originators, joined the planning group, where she represented both the JP Morgan Charitable Trust and the Booth Ferris Foundation. A respected leader of New York City's philanthropic community, Simmons played a key role in bringing other foundations, including corporate donors, into the group.

The founders soon invited others to the table. Laura Wolff, a program officer at the Robert Sterling Clark Foundation, was an early recruit. The Clark Foundation's mission—“to improve the performance of public institutions,” including schools—made for a natural fit with the general aims of the collaborative. Barbara Taveras, president of the Edward W. Hazen Foundation, joined a little later, bringing her foundation's experience in supporting community organizing. Hazen's work in public school reform was dedicated to “parent and community organizing and training around public school reform issues.”

¹ According to the organization's website (www.aspira.org), the ASPIRA Association is the only national nonprofit organization devoted solely to the education and leadership development of Puerto Rican and other Latino youth. ASPIRA takes its name from the Spanish verb *aspirar*, “to aspire.”

In all, 14 foundations entered the collaborative between 1995 and 1996.

Collaboration, flexibility and participation

In the spring of 1995, as the program officers began to map the workings of the collaborative, they made a series of closely intertwined decisions about how they would function and what strategies they would pursue. They returned often to a few key principles—collaboration, flexibility and participation—to guide their choices.

The planning group put considerable thought into the structure of the organization and its processes. Hoping to attract and hold as many participants as possible, for example, they set the minimum annual contribution to the pooled fund at \$25,000, low enough to attract smaller foundations but high enough to require genuine commitment. They debated the pros and cons of a weighted voting system, eventually deciding on a simple formula of one vote per foundation. After some debate, they agreed that the chair would rotate among the members of the collaborative (*see Exhibit 1 for DEC member guidelines and governance*).

In May, the planning committee decided that they had made enough headway to justify the hiring of a consultant to coordinate their work and manage the selection of grantees. They selected Norma Rollins, another former head of Advocates for Children. Rollins was fully conversant with local education politics and seemed to appreciate the challenges of managing a collaborative effort among many organizations.

On May 30, 1995, the Donors' Education Collaborative held its first official meeting with Rollins in attendance. Stern was elected to chair the group for its first year, and Simmons was elected to succeed her. DEC members confirmed their intention to operate as a group for five years, and they established a few ground rules regarding membership and decision-making—rules that would help them address the many questions they needed to answer as they defined their funding strategy and focus: What projects did they really want to fund? How would they choose grantees? How would they solve problems and settle their inevitable differences?

Debating those questions within the outlines established by the original group of foundation executives, DEC members strengthened their views about what they believed would and would not work. They were united, for example, in their disenchantment with funding “model programs” to improve school organization or classroom practice, at least for New York City. “High turnover of chancellors was the reality,” recalled Petrovich, “so you couldn’t count on them to make change. We felt that everything had been tried. People were disappointed with their grantees and with the schools.”

Developing a constituency for reform

Beyond the tribulations of the local school system, two other developments shaped the calculations and perceptions of New York City funders:

- **The Campaign for Fiscal Equity lawsuit:** In May 1993, the Campaign for Fiscal Equity filed suit in state Supreme Court challenging the constitutionality of New York state’s school-funding formula. That move was the opening salvo in what would become a decade-long

court battle, won by the Campaign in 2001 and again on appeal in 2003.² Several DEC member foundations were already funding the Campaign and had helped support the background work that led to the suit.

- **The Annenberg Challenge:** In December 1993, Walter Annenberg pledged a gift of a half billion dollars to improve public schools in the United States—a gift whose value would be multiplied by required matching from public and private sources. In November 1994, New York City was chosen as the first site. New York Networks for School Renewal, a collaboration among four citywide education and community organizations, would administer \$25 million over five years to support the creation of small schools. Some DEC members had already contributed toward the mandatory match but had no ongoing role in steering the work of the initiative.

To spur real improvements in the school system in this environment, DEC members agreed, they should support the growth of a constituency for reform—or, more immediately, a number of constituencies, organized around specific objectives and school- or neighborhood-level needs, that might eventually merge into a wider force.

One model that served as a common reference was the once-powerful United Parents Association, a citywide coalition that had rallied previous generations of parent activists through local battles in schools, occasionally calling on them to lend support to broader campaigns. In its heyday, the association had coordinated the activities and voices of parents for two purposes: to pressure the school system to do its job better and to defend that same system against budget cuts, political interference and other outside threats.

DEC did not seek to revive the United Parents Association. Times had changed, and the network of strong, school-based parent associations on which it had relied no longer existed, largely because of economic and demographic changes. But DEC members did believe that the association's history showed the value of building up from neighborhood activism to a citywide constituency. As Ucelli observed, the group believed that, tactically, “the best way to drive school reform in the city as a whole was to build reform and engagement in particular places”—either in neighborhoods or among particular constituencies, such as immigrant parents, principals or business leaders.

But was it reasonable to think that receptive constituencies actually existed? To explore that question, DEC commissioned a survey of public attitudes toward public schools. The study returned the encouraging result that New Yorkers generally held their schools in high regard. Heartened by the finding that many members of the public cared about public schools but had very limited opportunities to express or act on their concern, the funders agreed that they should support a mix of community organizing and policy development on behalf of public education and school reform.

² The Campaign for Fiscal Equity was still waging its fight for greater state aid to public schools in 2006. In its 2003 ruling, the New York Court of Appeals gave the state of New York until July 30, 2004 to comply with its order. When the state failed to meet this deadline, state Supreme Court Justice Leland DeGrasse ordered the development of a compliance plan and, in 2005, ruled that New York City schools needed an additional \$5.6 billion in operating aid and \$9.2 billion in capital funding to provide students with their constitutional right to the opportunity to receive a sound basic education. The state appealed this order, and the court again ruled in the Campaign's favor. In June 2006, the Campaign filed a brief to the Court of Appeals asking it to issue a clear and enforceable order that would bring the case to a close; the court is expected to schedule oral arguments for September.

Having settled on that very general strategy, DEC members began to craft a request for proposals. “The initial proposal request took a huge amount of work,” Stern explained. “Policy and organizing were identified at the start, but it took some wrangling to arrive at a balance.” Some member foundations emphasized community organizing in their own funding guidelines, while others stressed policy development; each side argued hard for its own perspective.

Rollins recalled that Petrovich played a crucial role in helping the group reach a compromise: “Over and over, Janice would listen to the group, go away, do some research, pull it together and write it up. Every group needs someone like that—a person who will put ideas out there coherently so people have something to discuss.”

Achieving consensus

Another debate erupted over the suggestion that all grantees be required to work in partnerships—a guideline that the group eventually adopted. “Collaboration was important to some people, although it wouldn’t have been my emphasis,” Stern noted. “Foundation-forced collaborations often don’t work out.” Still, in her role as chair she understood clearly the need for flexibility and openness toward the views of the group. Those who favored the requirement believed that grantee partnerships would set the stage for linking up constituencies, building the capacity of smaller and more isolated organizations, and bringing home the message that effective citywide organizing would require compromise and negotiation.

Members with grantmaking experience in New York City provided crucial intelligence on the local scene, drawing on their knowledge of current grantees.

Stern, for example, had supported the New York Immigration Coalition as it grew into a capable organization with a strong track record in immigrants’ rights issues. She explained to her colleagues that the coalition had never organized immigrant parents to “get the school system to pay attention to the needs of their kids,” but that they were in a good position to do so.

Dayna Cunningham, from the Rockefeller Brothers Fund, talked about the newly created Parents Organizing Consortium and its plan to connect neighborhood-based groups like Mothers on the Move in the Bronx and ACORN in Brooklyn into a citywide network.

Yet members were also aware of soft-pedaling their own agendas in the interest of maintaining an open process and achieving consensus. As Ucelli noted, “Rockefeller had a specific definition of school reform. I didn’t want to push that definition per se because it would have limited the work. And it probably would have been impossible for the group to reach agreement about it.”

Those whose foundations had specific ideas about how public policies should change stepped back from their own priorities in deference to the not-yet-articulated priorities of the constituencies they hoped to mobilize. “We realized,” said Lori Bezahler, a program officer at the Hazen Foundation who succeeded Taveras as its president, “that we shouldn’t be asking organizations what parents think or want; we should be asking them how they would help parents define the agenda.”

Moreover, although grantmakers would eventually need to justify DEC’s strategy to their own trustees, they realized that they could carry back two very powerful arguments, in addition to the details of the strategy itself. First, explained Laura Wolff of the Clark Foundation, “We all wanted to be at the table” and therefore in a position to influence the disposition of DEC’s considerable

grantmaking budget. Second, she said, “We all wanted to learn about things that were different from what we normally did.”

Selecting four initial projects

In June 1995, DEC distributed its request for proposals to a wide group of New York City nonprofits, including many of its members’ current grantees. Rollins and DEC members held three informational meetings to help clarify their desire to fund new and innovative projects in community organizing and constituency building and in education-policy development and advocacy. During those meetings, Rollins repeatedly emphasized that DEC would be taking a hard line on the requirement that organizations apply in collaboration with others. No grants would go to single organizations.

For prospective grantees, envisioning a partnership was often the toughest part. Rollins and others recalled “engineering” relationships to pursue strategies DEC especially wanted to fund. Two organizations—the relatively new Campaign for Fiscal Equity and the well-established Educational Priorities Panel—had ignored the partnership requirement, and had submitted separate proposals that presented different perspectives on how to advance the policy debate around school funding. Each group had its partisans within DEC, and together they negotiated a forced marriage, although with some strategic justification. “The collaboration got city and state perspectives involved together. The Campaign for Fiscal Equity needed to develop a state strategy, which the Educational Priorities Panel brought,” Petrovich explained.

DEC awarded planning grants to nine organizations in September 1995 and began to plan meetings at which grantees would firm up their partnerships and discuss strategy, communications and evaluation.

A subcommittee of DEC began to search for an evaluation team to conduct a theory of change evaluation, which would describe and assess the process of implementing the individual projects and the DEC initiative overall. According to Petrovich, the subcommittee explicitly sought evaluators who would “work closely with grantees in a way akin to strategic planning and consensus building.” Chapin Hall Center for Children was selected because of its expertise with community organizing, advocacy and school reform.

By February 1996, DEC had selected the evaluators, agreed on grant guidelines and secured funding for a two-year implementation budget of \$1.2 million. Over the next few months, Rollins, Stern and other DEC members sought dedicated funding for the evaluation, scanned for technical assistance providers, and searched for a communications firm to work with grantees and help DEC develop its own outreach strategy. In April, they met for the first time with the new schools chancellor, Rudolph Crew.

Meanwhile, a subcommittee charged with managing DEC’s external affairs was attempting to cultivate relationships with constituencies that some DEC members believed would prove valuable: the business community, the Bar Association and local education nonprofits.

In June 1996, DEC awarded implementation grants to four projects:

- the Equity Reform Project, through which two lead partners and three other organizations proposed to build a constituency for school finance reform in New York state;

- the Parent Organizing Consortium, which sought to coordinate and strengthen the work of a disparate collection of parent organizing groups in neighborhoods around New York City;
- Transforming Education for New York’s Newest, which brought together the New York Immigration Coalition and Advocates for Children to spearhead a campaign to improve educational services to the growing population of immigrant students; and
- the Metro Industrial Areas Foundation, which agreed to work with the Public Education Association to build a citywide parent coalition to press for specific education policy changes.

Underlying each project was the idea that grantees would become more effective by collaborating with peer organizations with complementary skills. For example, the New York Immigration Coalition had managed a range of successful projects on behalf of New York City’s immigrant communities but had little knowledge of education law or policy; Advocates for Children, by contrast, had enormous expertise in education law but lacked community organizing capacity. Left unclear was how the projects would interact with one another or how these grantees would come together to build the unified constituency that DEC envisioned.

By the time the implementation grants were awarded, DEC members had spent a great deal of time together, writing the proposal request, sorting through 40-50 initial and implementation proposals, and debating their likely efficacy. Several DEC participants recalled acknowledging among themselves a disquieting sense that the proposals overall were not as strong as they had hoped—a conclusion that oddly confirmed their view that the work was very much needed, yet which also meant that there was little point in debating the fine points of a shared, long-term theory of change. Managing more imminent problems—especially those associated with grantee collaborations—would be hard enough.

In October 1996, with implementation underway, the evaluators facilitated an intense discussion among DEC members about their expectations for the initiative (*see Exhibit 2 for meeting notes and conclusions*). Some continued to argue that measurable change—increased school funding, for example, or the adoption of new state or city policies—would be the only acceptable indicator of success. Many, however, had come to believe that building the capacity of their grantee organizations was a more realistic goal for what was envisioned as a five-year initiative.

Managing implementation

The four projects moved forward in an initial burst of confidence but soon hit some serious bumps. Many early problems were rooted in the projects’ struggles to coordinate constituency-building and policy agendas—a difficult feat, and one that was frequently complicated by tensions between partner organizations.³ Eventually, three of the four projects made accommodations that allowed them to move forward.

³ The 2001 and 2004 reports of the Chapin Hall evaluation team provide detailed and candid accounts of the work of the four DEC projects. See Janice M. Hirota, Robin Jacobowitz and Prudence Brown, *The Donors’ Education Collaborative: Strategies for Systemic School Reform* (Chapin Hall Center for Children, 2001) and Janice M. Hirota, Robin Jacobowitz and Prudence Brown, *Pathways to School Reform: Integrating Constituency Building and Policy Work* (Chapin Hall Center for Children, 2004). Both available online at, respectively, www.chapinhall.org/article_abstract.aspx?ar=1331 and www.chapinhall.org/article_abstract.aspx?ar=1358.

The partnership at the heart of the Equity Reform Project, for example, rapidly turned into what one grantmaker bluntly termed a “marriage made in hell,” as the “woefully mismatched” executive directors of the Campaign for Fiscal Equity and the Educational Priorities Panel failed to find common ground. A skillfully negotiated division of labor enabled each party to pursue complementary (although not exactly collaborative) work toward defining policy goals and building city and state constituencies for school finance reform.

A related problem plagued the Parents Organizing Consortium partnership. By focusing on education issues, the Consortium clearly met a palpable need: Many of its member neighborhood groups lacked school system expertise, and some operated within larger organizations that had other agendas besides education. Their representatives loyally attended lengthy meetings together, where they discussed their work and learned about school system developments, but they tended to reach an impasse whenever they tried to craft a common agenda for action. More experienced groups, especially those willing to use confrontational tactics, clashed with fledgling and more conciliatory groups when discussing demands and strategy. The Consortium had some success when its members managed to find common ground (around the shared need for solutions to school facilities problems, for example), but real progress became possible only after the Consortium redefined itself as the New York City parent-organizing wing of the statewide Alliance for Quality Education and dedicated itself exclusively to pushing for school finance reform.

The Transforming Education for New York’s Newest project also took some time to find its niche at the intersection of activism and policy change. For the first two years, the partnership developed tools that schools and districts could use to work more effectively with immigrant students. As the New York Immigration Coalition gained experience and credibility in the education arena, however, its leaders saw that piloting and pushing the adoption of those tools would be slow, complex and ultimately less important than other possible approaches. DEC and Advocates for Children agreed. The project made a radical and successful turn toward policy development and advocacy on issues such as bilingual education, access to opportunity for English language learners, translation services and other topics immediately relevant to immigrant students and families.

The Metro Industrial Areas Foundation project experienced some early success with research on underperforming schools, but its policy development goals never gelled into a parent-organizing agenda. The project was discontinued when one of the lead partners, the Public Education Association, merged with another organization and reoriented its priorities toward promoting school choice.

Adjusting strategy

DEC’s grantmaker members frequently deliberated strategic questions, learning and sometimes changing their minds in the process. Rollins facilitated those discussions, negotiated changes in grantees’ work plans, arranged for technical assistance and sometimes intervened to keep the work moving along. As Chapin Hall evaluator Janice Hirota explained, Rollins became the “incredible and necessary glue that held everything together,” helping grantees manage and sometimes reframe their relationships and projects.

For her part, Rollins described the involvement of the evaluation team as essential to the ongoing accountability of the work, especially at the beginning:

The Chapin Hall people were at every meeting and event. They spoke frankly with the grantees. Janice [Hirota] would make them think about why they were doing things, but she was also very careful about the integrity of the process. She did a framework development process with them every year, and people really got it. That process is still happening today.

To strengthen the capacity of its grantees, DEC also moved to tap the expertise of staff at New York University's Institute for Education and Social Policy. Realizing that many grantees, especially the parent neighborhood groups, were going to the Institute for advice, DEC decided to formalize those relationships with a series of annual grants, basically putting the Institute on retainer as a provider of technical assistance to DEC grantees who wanted the help, as well as to other school reform organizations around the city. A new organization in its own right, the Institute employed a core group of experienced community organizers and policy analysts who were profoundly interested in the challenges DEC grantees were facing and in supporting their efforts.

The steady flow of funds from DEC supported the Institute's growth and enabled it to involve DEC grantees in wider networks of policy development. For example, DEC funds helped the Institute establish the School Construction Working Group, which convened regular meetings of Parents Organizing Consortium members and other neighborhood advocacy groups as they dealt with common issues of school construction and facilities.

To help hammer out a common agenda for school facilities policy reform among community groups, the Institute invited "a lot of influential folks, including lenders, banks, community development organizations, architects from the Pratt Institute and others," according to its founder and director, Norm Fruchter, a former program officer at the Aaron Diamond Foundation. "None of us imagined the tremendous learning and cross-fertilization that would produce," Fruchter observed.

Relationships forged during that work later formed the basis for the influential Community Collaborative to Improve District 9 Schools (CC9), which the Institute launched in 2001 with financial support and strategic input from DEC; CC9 was a coalition of parent groups in the Bronx borough of New York City that came together to fight for education reform for the neighborhood's mostly poor students.⁴

Seeing connections—and strengthening them

As the grantees learned to balance community organizing and policy development, DEC member foundations also developed a more nuanced understanding of connections between the approaches. Bezahler said, "I was always one of the people out there stressing the importance of community organizing. Others did the same with policy development. But the truth is, we started talking each other's language. Our relationships grew rich."

⁴ For more information about CC9 impact, see Leigh Dingerson and Adam Levner, *A True Bronx Tale: How Parents and Teachers Joined Forces to Improve Teacher Quality* (Grantmakers for Education, February 2005). GFE commissioned this case study on CC9 for a special meeting of funders examining the relationships of teachers unions and philanthropy. Available online at www.edfunders.org/programs/listevent.asp?id=80.

In 2000, DEC's agreed-upon four-year implementation period came to a close without producing a clear set of outcomes, yet the projects seemed to be strong and stable, and tangible victories looked as if they might be just over the horizon. New York's Supreme Court had not yet ruled on the school finance case, but the Educational Priorities Panel and the Campaign for Fiscal Equity were poised to react when that finally happened. The New York's Newest project had been reorganized and was firmly under the leadership of the New York Immigration Coalition, its partnership revitalized by the arrival of new leadership at Advocates for Children. The members of the Parents Organizing Consortium had built firm bonds with the Institute for Education and Social Policy.

Most promisingly, by 2000, four years into a turbulent implementation period, DEC grantees were realizing some genuine synergy and looking ahead to next steps. For example:

- The New York Immigration Coalition and Advocates for Children now knew enough about how immigrant parents experienced the school system to understand, first, that explicit policies would be needed in areas such as translation services and, second, that putting such policies in place would be labor intensive and politically tricky.
- Parent groups that belonged to the Parents Organizing Consortium anticipated the resolution of New York City's school finance case and wondered how they could get involved in advocating for meaningful school funding reform by New York state. Institute for Education and Social Policy staff proposed that Consortium member groups might get better results if they affiliated along neighborhood lines and applied pressure for reform much closer to home, at the school district level.

Continuing the work together

DEC members therefore decided to renew their collaboration and grantmaking for another two years through 2002—the first year to continue (or to wind down) the three remaining projects and the evaluation, and the second year to study the possibility of transitioning to new work. And why not? For the funders, the advantages of remaining in the partnership were many, and the costs in terms of staff time and grant dollars moderate, even for those who regularly exceeded the \$25,000 minimum contribution.

The Hazen Foundation's experience was fairly typical: For a grant that amounts to “a small piece of the annual budget, about the size of an average grant,” Bezahler explained, the foundation got a place at the table and a chance to participate in a wide range of high-interest (and potentially high-impact) projects that were managed day to day by a capable and knowledgeable consultant.

Rollins had developed a repertoire of strategies for keeping members in the group—earmarking certain funders' contributions to evaluations, for example, in keeping with the wishes of their boards, or being sensitive to their funding cycles. She also organized site visits and other opportunities to learn, which were especially valuable for new staff at the member foundations.

In addition, Petrovich suggested, Rollins ensured that “the meetings are well run, everyone is treated respectfully and new representatives are made to feel welcome.” “As an organizer,” Rollins said, “it has always been my theory that we want to include people, and we certainly don't want to do things that push them out.” Some funders left in any given year, to be sure, but the cohesion of the group did not diminish.

For DEC members, grantees' ongoing frustrations and successes—the state's stonewalling of the court's order in the school finance case, or a dead-end meeting with Chancellor Harold Levy, or a constructive dialogue with Deputy Chancellor Michelle Cahill—shaped their understanding of what was possible in New York City school reform, and how outside organizations and constituencies could influence school improvement.

That understanding began to inform other funding decisions by DEC members acting independently. For example, according to Eric Zachary of the Institute for Education and Social Policy, the development of CC9's innovative attempt in the Bronx to improve teacher quality—in which the school district agreed to create lead teacher positions responsible for mentoring less-experienced colleagues in some of the city's lowest-performing schools—depended critically on the understanding of a local community of funders:

We had formed a planning committee to do something about problems in the schools in part of District 9. It included officials from the Department of Education, the United Federation of Teachers, New Visions for Public Schools and others. Parents ran all the meetings. Our proposal for the lead teacher program came out of that process. We then had a meeting at which everyone agreed to raise money to make it possible. For leverage, we were able to obtain pledges from Booth Ferris, Carnegie, The New York Community Trust, the Clark Foundation and Washington Mutual. Pledges in hand, we went to Chancellor Klein and were able to get a commitment to start the pilot.

1996-2002: What Was Accomplished?

The Chapin Hall evaluation team worked with the Donors' Education Collaborative and its grantees for more than six years, following the early development of DEC's grantmaking strategy through the implementation and development stages. In 2004, Chapin Hall published a report that examined how DEC projects implemented their change strategies between 1996 and 2002, and it sought to identify broader lessons about efforts to change policy and build constituencies.

The executive summary of the report summarized the evaluators' findings regarding the outcomes of the three major DEC-funded projects⁵:

- **The Equity Reform Project:** The grantees worked to create a citizens' mandate for school finance reform linked to a finance equity suit brought against New York state by the Campaign for Fiscal Equity. Involved in this effort was a diverse range of organizations, including statewide education organizations; local community-based organizations; parent, teacher and student groups; and local and statewide business organizations.

As part of its constituency-building strategy, the Project created forums in New York City and in regions across the state that engaged participants in defining a "sound basic education," which the state constitution mandates be provided for every child in the state. This definition was later used in the court case and accepted by the court as the legal definition of every child's constitutionally protected educational right. The Project's partners included the Campaign for Fiscal Equity, Educational Priorities Panel, the Foundation for Citizen

⁵ See Hirota, Jacobowitz and Brown, 2004.

Education of the League of Women Voters of New York, Urban League of New York City (for two years), and Schuyler Center for Analysis and Advocacy.

- **The Parent Organizing Consortium:** The grantees aimed to build a citywide association of grassroots organizations working to promote parent-generated demand for education reform and to bring parental voices into education debates and decision-making. Member organizations focused on neighborhoods or communities of interest, such as ethnic groupings, and they employed community-organizing approaches—such as reaching out to and training parents and other community members and rallies and meetings with policymakers—to engage parents in education and other institutional issues that affect individual, family and community well-being.

Over the course of the six years, the Consortium focused on the city level, working on issues such as school facilities and construction, class size reduction and low-performing schools. Its full-term participants were ACORN, Community Action Project, Mothers on the Move, and Northwest Bronx Community and Clergy Coalition.

- **Transforming Education for New York’s Newest:** The grantees sought to improve education for immigrant and English-language learner students by focusing on the implementation of standards, multilingual communications with parents, appropriate assessment and placement of students, and other issues. The project used local forums, informational tools such as a get-out-the-vote campaign, and other means to engage community-based and citywide groups working with immigrant populations. In this way, the effort was able to help build capacity in the organizations and, through the organizations, reach diverse immigrant communities across the city.

Many of the organizations active in the project were direct-service providers, often with little policy or constituency-building experience around education issues. In addition, Transforming Education for New York’s Newest worked at the city and state levels—issuing position papers, providing testimony, meeting with policymakers and their staffs, and participating in advisory committees—to help shape the public debate and decision-making on education reform for immigrant and English-language learner students. New York Immigration Coalition was the lead partner in this project and worked with Advocates for Children.

The DEC strategy of supporting school reform by funding constituency building and advocacy was always subject to the very significant caveat that neither well-organized communities nor very effective advocates can reliably effect particular changes in schools or education policy. Yet DEC members accepted that risk, in part because supporting improvements within New York City’s chaotic and politicized school system seemed even more uncertain of producing results. By working together, the foundations distributed the burden of risk among them while also gaining opportunities to learn from peers, debate strategy freely and participate in projects outside their usual agendas.

The future of the Donors' Education Collaborative: A unique niche and a unique way of working together

The Donors' Education Collaborative created a unique niche for itself within New York City's philanthropic culture and it provided a unique opportunity for its members to learn and work together on intractable social and education problems in the city. DEC supports the advocacy and organizing of projects that few other funders are willing to, and it has now provided that support for over a decade.

DEC grantees have strengthened local constituencies for school improvement and garnered new credibility for community organizing and advocacy groups. Moreover, DEC and its grantees learned to collaborate strategically with school system and city officials and to deploy their collective influence to leverage change.

Twenty-seven foundations and donors have committed to participate in DEC through 2007, contributing a total of \$9,433,000 since its inception (*see Exhibit 3 for a statement of contributions, expenses and grants*). No longer scheduled to cease operating on a projected date, it will continue to exist as long as its members remain interested in its strategies and outcomes.

Apart from the Chapin Hall evaluation, DEC participants themselves pointed to the following examples of breakthrough successes that give them hope that their work together is making a difference in New York City's public schools:

- In 2004, the City Department of Education collaborated with the New York Immigration Coalition and Advocates for Children to create the school system's first office dedicated to translating written materials for parents. In 2006, under pressure from the City Council and DEC grantees, Chancellor Joel Klein expanded the unit and drafted new regulations to secure parents' right to information in their home languages.
- After a one-year pilot, the City Department of Education announced in the fall of 2005 that it would expand the lead teacher program, which had been developed and piloted by the parent leaders of CC9 (now called CCB) in the Bronx, to other parts of the city.
- In early 2006, the Alliance for Quality Education launched a campaign to make parents and other New Yorkers aware of the state's long delay in complying with the school finance court order. The campaign coincided with a parallel push by Mayor Michael Bloomberg, who urged the state legislature to take action.

However, the impact of DEC has not been limited to its grantees, nor have DEC members' investments been limited to grants to the collaborative. Some members have leveraged DEC grants with their own additional grants to cultivate related projects and support particular aspects of the work, such as litigation, that DEC does not fund. Some have seen their own local and national grantmaking strategies evolve to reflect lessons learned from their DEC experience.

All these developments suggest evidence of a carefully cultivated spirit of collaboration among forward-looking school system officials, organizing and advocacy groups, and an informed community of local funders.

Bezahler, reflecting on her foundation's support for DEC and other similar funder collaboratives, stressed that the ability of these collaborations to achieve this sort of leverage and influence depends on deep local knowledge: "The educational policy context is *so local*. A collaborative needs people around the table who are in that context every day. This is important if education funders are going to aim for systems change."

She identified four ways in which participation in the Donors' Education Collaborative changed the way she and her staff conduct their work:

We now see collaboration with other funders differently. For example, we were involved in developing the Funders' Collaborative for Youth Organizing, which draws directly on what we learned through DEC. We're also applying lessons from DEC to a national education organizing coalition that is currently in development. We know that we need people with strong local perspectives at the table for that.

We've learned a lot about who grassroots groups need to be in relationships with and what they need to know about if they're going to do their work well in education.⁶ Basically, they've got to have an understanding of education policy, content (meaning curriculum and pedagogy), and how to collaborate with other organizations, including nonprofits, schools and even teacher unions.

As staff, we're better able to answer some of the tough questions we get from our board. They want to see connections between community organizing and changes in the quality of education. We're emphasizing those connections in our new five-year program plan.

Finally, we apply lessons we've learned here in New York to our work in other cities. We've asked ourselves whether we can re-create aspects of the collaboration—with the NYU Institute, for example. The truth is the New York City infrastructure doesn't exist everywhere. For us, this may mean longer-term grants to build some of that infrastructure.

⁶ For a more detailed report on lessons learned about supporting constituency building from the point of view of three DEC members, see Lori Bezahler, Susan Cahn and Cassie Schwerner, "Collaborative Mobilizing for Education Reform," *NCRP Quarterly* (Winter 2003-04). Available online at www.schottfoundation.org/publications/Collaborative%20Mobilizing%20For%20Education%20Reform.pdf.

EXHIBIT 1

DONOR'S EDUCATION COLLABORATIVE OF NEW YORK CITY Membership Guidelines and Governance

DEC's guidelines for members were established at the outset and have never changed. These few simple rules provide enough structure to enable the group to make hard decisions while at the same time offering enough flexibility to manage shifts and fluctuations. The guidelines are also structured to give foundations incentives to join the collaborative and to make it easy to stay over time.

- **Minimum annual contribution:** \$25,000
- **Voting:** Each member foundation has one vote, regardless of the size of its contribution.
- **Chair:** The chair rotates annually, with the chairperson elected a year in advance to ensure an orderly transition.
- **Attendance and quorum:** For a meeting to take place, a simple majority of voting members must be in attendance. (A qualification, which the group has never needed to invoke, specifies that decisions can be made only when two-thirds of the voting members are present.)
- **Proxy voting:** A member may not assign its vote by proxy to another foundation, although it may cast a vote in advance or send another individual to represent it.

EXHIBIT 2

DONORS' EDUCATION COLLABORATIVE OF NEW YORK CITY Grantmaking Strategy

At a DEC meeting in October 1996, evaluators asked the group's members to clarify expectations for long-term outcomes, their own theory of change and their assumptions about their role in working with grantees. The following questions and answers are extracted from the official meeting notes.

What long-term outcomes does DEC expect from the grantees?

Members agreed that we are seeking systemic change as the long-term outcome. Some indicated that grantees will have "failed" if no systemic change is evident within the five-year period.

But some DEC members cautioned that there are limitations to what can be accomplished by our grantees. Their goals are fairly limited and local. We have not given them enough money to "change the world." Even as we give them access to people in power through technical assistance, their efforts are more likely to make incremental rather than dramatic change.

Members agreed that the grantees should be evaluated on *outcomes*. Outcomes mentioned that could be useful measures for some or all grantees over the long term are

- specific, measurable systems change has taken place (for example, more money coming to New York City schools);
- there is increased public debate, including more media and television debate about the issues addressed by the grantees; and
- the options are better laid out and are accessible to broader groups of people.

What is DEC's theory of change?

Members agreed that the theory of DEC's grantmaking is that policymakers will respond to an informed constituency that makes its voice known. DEC's explicit formula is to try to build broad-based support for systemic educational reform based on policy analysis.

What role should DEC play with its grantees and beyond?

Members indicated that DEC's role with its grantees should be one of facilitation. They mentioned the following specific examples:

- Facilitate communication among the grantees. Help each grantee know what other grantees are doing. Help grantees make the linkages between each group's issues and how the issues work together.
- Provide grantees with technical assistance, including communications consulting help.
- Create a climate, especially through technical assistance sessions, where it will be beneficial for grantees to come together.
- Bring the grantees together to think about something or to learn together about something happening somewhere else.
- At times, facilitate grantees working together on issues or projects.

EXHIBIT 3**DONORS' EDUCATION COLLABORATIVE OF NEW YORK CITY****Contributions 1995-2007**

(as of February 2006)

Foundation	Number of Years	Span	Total
Booth Ferris Foundation	12	1995-2007	900,000
Carnegie Corporation	3	2002-2005	100,000
Robert Sterling Clark Foundation	10	1995-2005	290,000
Deutsche Bank	6	1998-2002, 2005-2007	208,000
Aaron Diamond Foundation	2	1995-1996	100,000
Dickler Family Fund	2	2002-2004	60,000
The Ford Foundation	12	1995-2007	3,350,000
Alva and Bernard Gimbel Foundation	4	2002-2006	200,000
The Greenwall Foundation	3	1997-1999	75,000
The Stella and Charles Guttman Foundation	4	1995-1999	100,000
The Edward W. Hazen Foundation	9	1996-2005	245,000
Charles Evan Hughes Memorial Foundation	1	2005	25,000
J. P. Morgan Charitable Trust	6	1995-2001	450,000
New York Foundation	3	1995-1997	75,000
The New York Community Trust	12	1995-2007	605,000
The Pinkerton Foundation	3	1995-1997	95,000
Charles H. Revson Foundation	2	1997-1998	50,000
Rockefeller Brothers Fund	12	1995-2007	550,000
Rockefeller Foundation	12	1995-2007	550,000
Caroline and Sigmund Schott Foundation	7	1999-2006	305,000
Nate B. and Frances Spingold Foundation	5	1995-2000	125,000
W. Clement and Jessie V. Stone Foundation	1	2000	25,000
Surdna Foundation, Inc.	1	1996	50,000
The Travelers Foundation	2	1996-1997	50,000
H VanAmeringen Foundation	3	1996-1998	250,000
Washington Mutual	2	2002-2004	50,000
Anonymous Donor	3	1996-1998	30,000
TOTAL CONTRIBUTIONS			8,913,000
Interest earned			530,000
TOTAL FUNDS			9,443,000

Source: Donor's Education Collaborative of New York City.

EXHIBIT 3 (continued)**DONORS' EDUCATION COLLABORATIVE OF NEW YORK CITY****Expenses 1995-2007**

(as of February 2006)

	PHASE 1: Planning and Implementation	PHASE 2: Transition	PHASE 3: Completed	PHASE 4: Current	TOTAL
	May 1995 - June 2001	July 2001 - June 2002	July 2002 - June 2005	July 2005 - June 2007	
GRANTS					
Planning grants	135,000				135,000
Implementation grants					
Brooklyn Education Collaborative				100,000	100,000
Equity Reform Project	1,160,000	210,000	200,000		1,570,000
New York's Newest	900,000	150,000	450,000	337,250	1,837,250
Metro Industrial Areas Foundation	600,000				600,000
Parents Organizing Consortium	900,000	150,000			1,050,000
Community Collaborative for Bronx Schools (formerly CC9)		125,000	150,000	300,000	575,000
Alliance for Quality Education		100,000	200,000	300,000	600,000
Educational Priorities Panel			100,000		100,000
Least Restrictive Environment	75,000	75,000			150,000
Parent-Youth Transformation			50,000		50,000
Urban Youth Collaborative				100,000	100,000
TECHNICAL ASSISTANCE					
Douglas Gould and Co. (communications)	189,000				189,000
Institute for Education and Social and Education Policy	202,500	75,000	200,000	100,000	577,500
Fundraising for grantees	40,000				40,000
Meetings of grantees	6,000				6,000
CONSULTANTS					
Chapin Hall evaluation	524,500	37,500			562,000
DEC coordination	197,000	35,000	120,000	40,000	392,000
Media audit	10,000				10,000
DEC brochures and dissemination	12,500		10,000		22,500
Postage, transportation	4,000	1,500	1,500	1,500	8,500
TOTAL EXPENSES	4,955,500	959,000	1,481,500	1,278,750	8,674,750

Source: Donor's Education Collaborative of New York City.

LESSONS FOR EDUCATION PHILANTHROPY

This case study suggests four important lessons for grantmakers seeking to increase their impact:

- **Pooled resources can bring more significant resources to bear on a problem—and therefore promise a greater likelihood of success.**

DEC's grantmaking budget represented a larger amount than what any one of its donors, large or small, could have contributed or justified to DEC's four grantees and their work. By aggregating funds from large and small donors into one grantmaking vehicle—at a cost “about the size of an annual grant,” according to one participating member—individual donors leveraged their investments and accomplished much more than they could have alone.

- **Collaboration pools not only grantmaking dollars but also grantmakers' wisdom and knowledge.**

As one grantmaker observed about DEC, “We all wanted to learn about things that were different from what we normally did.” By working in tandem with funders who are tackling education problems from different vantage points, using theories of change, and pursuing distinctive grantmaking objectives, foundations can enrich and inform each other's work. DEC members adjusted their own education strategies in New York City and elsewhere based on lessons learned from DEC's grantmaking results.

- **As with all grantmaking, persistence and adaptability are key practices for effectiveness.**

The current phase of DEC's work, after many refinements to its original strategy, appears to be yielding the most significant return on its long-term investment in improving New York City's public schools.

- **Collaboration with other funders can yield a distinctive, opportunistic grantmaking strategy that is broadly owned and different from what a foundation might do on its own.**

In New York City in the mid-1990s, school budgets had been slashed, social controversies had erupted in schools, and there was no consensus as to the best path forward for reform. In this murky environment, DEC settled on the unconventional strategy of re-energizing neighborhood activists and unifying them into a citywide constituency for better schools—a strategy and set of grantees that some DEC members would not have funded independently.

SELF-STUDY QUESTIONS

Questions to consider while reading this case about effective education grantmaking:

1. What is the Donors' Education Collaborative of New York City's theory of change—its assumptions, activities and expected outcomes? Is it a plausible theory? Why or why not?
2. What role does collaboration play in DEC's overall grantmaking strategy? As outlined in this case study, what are the advantages and disadvantages New York-area funders confronted in deciding to work collaboratively?
3. What is your assessment of the four projects DEC funded in 1996? In what ways were these initiatives aligned with *leverage, influence and collaboration*, one of GFE's Principles for Effective Education Grantmaking?
4. Could a single foundation pursue DEC's grantmaking approach and be successful? Why or why not?
5. Did DEC's grantmaking in New York City result in a good overall outcome? Why or why not?
6. What would you recommend that DEC do next? Why?
7. Collaboration can range from coordinating strategies among multiple funders working on a common issue, to identifying other foundations to help fund a initiative, to establishing a formal structure for pooling and granting funds over a sustained period of time; in other words, it may be co-developed or led by a single foundation, episodic or ongoing. What obstacles at your organization impede collaboration with other foundations?
8. What specific lessons and insights did you gain from this case study and how might they apply to your grantmaking work in education?

EPILOGUE

In August 2006, Jane R. Stern, one of the leaders of the Donors' Education Collaborative and a program director at The New York Community Trust, reflected on the impact of the collaborative in New York City—and whether its grantmaking model could be replicated in other communities.

The New York Community Trust was one of the five founding members of DEC, which was created as a donor-advised fund at The Trust, with the donors to DEC serving as its advisory board. I was the first chair of the advisory board and that role has now rotated back to me.

Because The Trust is a community foundation, public education is one of the priorities of its grantmaking program and we support all elements of DEC's strategy: advocacy, organizing and policy work. However, The Trust responds to a range of needs in New York City, and, by itself, could not have allocated funding to support an advocacy program on the same scale as DEC. The Trust has made a strong and sustained commitment of funding and staff time to DEC because it provides the opportunity to pool philanthropic resources to address critical public education issues.

For those of us who started DEC, the purpose was to improve public education in New York City for all children, but particularly for kids whom the schools were failing. We recognized that most previous reforms and model projects, including those that our respective foundations had supported, had come and gone without any lasting impact. In the face of frequent turnover of chancellors, widely fluctuating economic conditions and political swings, we concluded that it was important to build an effective advocacy constituency to demand, support and protect public education reform. With that goal in mind, we decided that DEC would offer sustained support for collaborative efforts among stakeholders who advocate for needed changes in education policies.

The evolving group of 27 grantmakers who have participated in DEC includes donors who operate under diverse mandates and guidelines: national foundations, foundations that only work in New York, corporations, individual donors, funders who concentrate on education and those who do not usually make education grants, and foundations that support policy work and others that fund community organizing. In joining DEC, they accepted DEC's grantmaking strategy of supporting projects that combine constituency building, policy development and advocacy. None of us thinks the DEC approach is the only effective one, and most DEC members continue to make their own education grants in New York.

Common agreement on DEC's strategy does not mean that there is always agreement on which projects fit DEC guidelines or are most deserving of support. But DEC members have been able to compromise and listen to other viewpoints. For the early rounds of grants, we needed formal voting mechanisms, but currently the level of trust is such that we make most decisions by consensus.

From the beginning, we realized that sustained support at a significant level would be essential to creating effective advocacy projects, and DEC's grants tend to be bigger than all but the largest DEC members would make. Originally, we thought that five years would be sufficient to effect change. As this case study points out, that was not nearly enough time for either the projects or for DEC itself. We have extended the time line of the collaborative three times, continuing to support the three

successful original projects: improving education for immigrant students, public engagement around the Campaign for Fiscal Equity law suit, and building a city- and statewide coalition of parent and citizens groups. We also provided support to a New York University institute to build the capacity of DEC grantees and other school reform groups in the city.

At the same time, DEC members recognize the importance of being open to new advocacy approaches. In addition to continuing support for the three original grantees, DEC has made grants to four newer collaborative efforts that grew out of earlier grants. The projects are

- a partnership of Bronx housing and community organizing groups that works together to press for reforms that reduce teacher turnover in neighborhood schools;
- a collaboration of parent groups and unions that seeks the implementation of equitable science and other programs in disadvantaged Brooklyn middle schools;
- a collaboration among youth organizations that advocates for better guidance and other services in high schools serving low-income students;
- the school access project, which organizes communities to prevent “pushouts” of high school students.

Last year, we also made a grant to study what is required to provide an adequate education to English language learners and how much it will cost. We expect the report to have national implications.

DEC’s work and its success can be replicated elsewhere. What is required is a long-term view, a commitment to public education combined with the belief that it must serve all students well, and a genuine willingness to collaborate with other grantmakers and different kinds of organizations. There are already collaborations of funders in other cities, working together to support systemic improvements to their public school systems. While we are fortunate in New York to be the “home” of several large national foundations that are committed to public education and to have access to philanthropic dollars that would not be available elsewhere, we also are working within the largest (and, it sometimes seems, the most complicated) school system in the country.

DEC is about to enter a new phase with renewed energy. While its founders never thought that nearly 12 years later DEC would still be a vital effort, most of its original funders are still involved. Current members are making renewal grants to DEC and additional foundations are considering membership. A confluence of circumstances has made DEC more important than ever.

On the positive side, a resolution to the Campaign for Fiscal Equity court case is expected this year that should bring new funds to city schools, along with funds that have already been allocated for facilities; the city’s Department of Education has instituted promising reforms, including creating more than 200 new small high and middle schools; and New Yorkers now rate education as one of their most important issues.

On the negative side, while test scores in the elementary grades have gone up, middle school scores have not; there is concern about low graduation rates; and teacher and principal turnover continues to be high. In addition, there is no accountability system to ensure that any new funds coming to the city from the Campaign for Fiscal Equity case will be used effectively.

This fall, DEC will be considering new grants related to these issues.

NOTES

PRINCIPLES FOR

Effective Education Grantmaking

- principle
no.

1 Discipline and Focus

In education, where public dollars dwarf private investments, a funder has greater impact when grantmaking is carefully planned and targeted.
- principle
no.

2 Knowledge

Information, ideas and advice from diverse sources, as well as openness to criticism and feedback, can help a funder make wise choices.
- principle
no.

3 Resources Linked to Results

A logic-driven “theory of change” helps a grantmaker think clearly about how specific actions will lead to desired outcomes, thus linking resources with results.
- principle
no.

4 Effective Grantees

A grantmaker is effective only when its grantees are effective. Especially in education, schools and systems lack capacity and grantees (both inside and outside the system) may require deeper support.
- principle
no.

5 Engaged Partners

A funder succeeds by actively engaging its partners—the individuals, institutions and communities connected with an issue—to ensure “ownership” of education problems and their solutions.
- principle
no.

6 Leverage, Influence and Collaboration

The depth and range of problems in education make it difficult to achieve meaningful change in isolation or by funding programs without changing public policies or opinions. A grantmaker is more effective when working with others to mobilize and deploy as many resources as possible in order to advance solutions.
- principle
no.

7 Persistence

The most important problems in education are often the most complex and intractable, and will take time to solve.
- principle
no.

8 Innovation and Constant Learning

Even while acting on the best available information—as in Principle #2—a grantmaker can create new knowledge about ways to promote educational success. Tracking outcomes, understanding costs and identifying what works—and what doesn’t—are essential to helping grantmakers and their partners achieve results.

Grantmakers for Education improves the knowledge, networks and effectiveness of education philanthropy. By connecting effective education strategies with effective grantmaking strategies, we help foundations and donors leverage their investments to improve achievement and opportunities for all students. Founded in 1995, we are a national association of over 200 philanthropies that connects grantmakers with knowledgeable leaders, promising programs, experienced colleagues and actionable research.

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