MAINE COMMUNITY FOUNDATION

Welcome to Maine,

"The Way Life Should Be"

Strengthening Families: The Ford Rural CAP effort, 1996-2000

Just the Facts, Ma'am

- Facts on Maine
  - Population =1.2 million, density =40/sq.mi
  - 90% of state is forested
  - 52% of state considered rural
  - Poverty rate highest in N.England =13% in early 90's
- Facts on MCF
  - In 1996 when RDP started, MCF assets =$30 mil; by end $60 mil
  - 6 county funds ranging from $150,000-$700,000
  - Statewide, headquartered in a rural "service center" city

Know Thy Community Foundation

- MCF had rural roots and structure to serve rural
- Rising tide did not lift all ships in Sustainable Communities Initiative
- Low income individuals and families have critical knowledge about what works to move them out of poverty; organizations serving them didn't
- Dedicated staff time is needed to have an impact working in a specific community, and we didn't have it.

Catalyst(s)

- Primary

  Ford Foundation's RDCF initiative-they wanted to know what worked to address poverty in rural areas

- Secondary

  MCF rural niche and wanting to develop and capitalize on it-we wanted to grow resources available to address rural issues

What?

- Strengthening Families by redesigning social service provision to be more

  -holistic

  -client- centered

  -outcomes- based

  -focused on assets

Two Related What's

- Increasing Civic Capacity
  - Endowment building in rural areas
  - Leadership development for county fund committees

- Strengthening Non-profits

  -provided project grants to key rural non profits (CAPs)to build their capacity to serve rural families(strategic planning, staff development, organizational culture consultants, cross sector collaborations)

  -worked on internal organizational issues of MCF

With Whom?

- Grantee partners
  - Organizations that were in most direct contact with people living in poverty-CAPs
  - Early innovators-CAPs that were already thinking about how to more holistically address poverty in their regions
  - RFP process, we selected 3 CAPs as grantees, each from a region where we had a county fund. Made multi-year commitments and larger organizational capacity building grants
  - Committed to convening/peer learning regularly

With Whom? continued

- Technical Assistance Providers
  - University of Maine Cooperative Extension-3 year contract to assist with peer learning, grantee coaching, documentation
  - Axia Associates-contract based on producing a "toolkit" which would help other organizations replicate learning/strategy
  - Other resource people as needed (Aspen, Sheraden, Kline, Yellowood,etc.)

Where? For Whom?

- In the regions of the state where we had county funds (7 counties)

- Asset-poor groups: families with which CAPS were working

Which Resources and How Much?

- Internal at MCF

  -1FTE (included 20-25% of CEO, 25% program staff, 50% of new communications/development officer)
- External

  -Cooperative Extension staff (30-40 days/r)

  -Various consultants
- Total budget of $500,000 over 3 years

How Long?

- Initial length of project was 3 years (driven by outside funding)
- Limited Funding extended for two years to do follow up and outcomes work
- Much of initial strategy on endowment building and organizational development is on-going at MCF today

So What?

Desired outcomes/proposed indicators for:

1)Rural Communities/Families

-People of low income will move beyond poverty, with support of community based organizations as a result of CAP approach

# of families/individuals in CAP client base who improve economic security as measured by jobs, income, asset accumulation, networks)

So What? continued

2)Partners and Grantees

- CAPs and their partners will involve low income people in designing techniques, projects and programs to move rural citizens beyond poverty
- CAPs will change their missions, structures, methods and increase their effectiveness of their funds

  # of changes to organizational mission, structure, methods and funding to increase performance

  #of new community partners engaged

  # of low income people who advise CAPs

So What? continued

3) For MCF

- MCF will use its grantmaking and partnership building process to empower other community organizations to tackle rural poverty issues
- MCF will develop feedback loops to learn more about conditions under which grantmaking and partnerships are likely to make a positive difference in assisting people of low income to move beyond poverty

So What? continued

MCF indicators:

-results of strategic planning and organizational development activities

-involvement of county funds in making effective grants in rural development and poverty arena

-evidence that MCF has become a learning organization with feedback loops

-evidence that MCF is helping grantees move towards learning organization philosophy and operation

So What? continued

- Our learning framework, more than quantitative indicators, was the most useful design piece
- Staff and consultants met regularly to record learning and integrate into future of program
- Learning institutes (2x/yr) with grantee partners also allowed learning and documentation of progress
- We conducted an evaluation which had both qualitative and quantitative evidence of change

Three Things We Learned

- MCF's asset-based, community building grantmaking approach works to address rural poverty and should be integrated into all program work
- Organizational capacity building takes time, tenacity, and financial resources to do right
- Building unrestricted endowments for rural areas is slow and time-consuming, but it builds local confidence as well as assets, so it's an important approach to addressing rural poverty

Best of What Happened

- Grantees and MCF shifted mental models and organizational structures to address poverty more holistically
- Family Development Accounts in ME
- Rural grantmaking and endowment building became stronger focus of MCF
- Initiated a new organizational capacity building grant program

Toughest Things We Experienced

- Parallel learning between MCF/grantees, including issues around language, trust, and relationship building
- Integration of direct service work with the rural poor and high-end conceptualizing
- Difficulty in measuring success of impact on rural poverty

Advice

- ✓ Start RDP with clearly articulated outcomes and indicators; establish feedback loops
- ✓ Design the program as a cross-functional team. Know your skill sets
- ✓ Create collaborative partnerships
- ✓ Invest in the long term
- ✓ Establish credibility in rural before you start