

**STRENGTHENING NEIGHBORHOOD ORGANIZING IN  
HARTFORD**

**A REPORT TO THE HARTFORD FOUNDATION  
FOR PUBLIC GIVING**

**Lisa Raghelli  
Andrew Mott  
Larry Parachini**

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# **Strengthening Neighborhood Organizing in Hartford: A Report to the Hartford Foundation for Public Giving**

## **Introduction**

Hartford is at an important juncture. For several years the City has been undergoing a physical transformation as evidenced by the Six Pillars, including Adriaen's Landing, The Learning Corridor, HOPE VI developments throughout the city, and new investment in physical improvements in the North End by public and private institutions have brought about visible change. However, poverty remains acute in the capital city of the wealthiest state in the country. The neighborhoods are struggling with many issues, including lack of jobs, public safety issues, deteriorating housing, under-resourced schools, and the return of formerly incarcerated individuals into their community. Many Hartford leaders are determined that their city will not become another Baltimore, with dramatic improvements in the downtown business district juxtaposed against declining neighborhoods, with a widening gap between the suburbs and the city, between rich and poor.

Hartford has a solid legacy of community-based organizations and committees that engage in various kinds of resident engagement, community services, planning, and community building. With help from the Neighborhood Support Collaborative, community-development corporations have honed their skills and effectiveness in producing affordable housing and other kinds of community projects. The Neighborhood Revitalization Zones (NRZs) have developed and begun implementing strategic plans to foster physical improvements and economic development in the neighborhoods. Several longstanding social service agencies and civic associations provide critical services to their communities and strengthen their social fabric. These are all important community institutions whose activities should continue to be supported.

This report focuses on another critical community activity—neighborhood organizing. Hartford has a proud history of neighborhood organizing, with community-based organizations involving large numbers of people in making substantial contributions to their neighborhoods and the city generally. This history of productive organizing has been supported by the Hartford Foundation for Public Giving, other foundations, and such unusual sources as the City government and the United Way – funders which in many other cities have been slow to support grassroots organizing.

Organizing has accomplished many tangible benefits for residents. (See Appendices for detailed assessments of organizing and resident engagement.) These include renovated buildings, restored parks and other improvements that are important to immediate neighbors—and other changes as ambitious as creation of the Hartford Construction Jobs Initiative and the Community Court. The jobs funnel has trained and employed hundreds of residents in well-paying construction jobs, and the model will soon be replicated to funnel residents into permanent jobs in new commercial and retail developments. The Community Court has been a breakthrough in helping residents address nuisance and quality of life issues which are so important to neighborhood

morale and vitality. In addition, through organizing, residents have been able to persuade powerful institutions to commit the resources and the policy changes which have been critical to the expansion of community development corporations and community-based services in the city.

Community organizing has also made other highly significant contributions, giving voice to people who seldom influence their own communities or citywide policy, and developing leaders who serve the city in many ways – as neighborhood representatives, as members of the City Council, as Mayor, as influential people in other government posts and elsewhere in the private and nonprofit sectors.

It is an important time to conduct this assessment of neighborhood organizing. The state of organizing today is fragile throughout the city, and yet there are important opportunities for helping residents move to the next stage in developing their power and capacity to contribute to revitalizing Hartford. By more effectively channeling resources into the building of strong, effective community-based organizations, Hartford institutions can ensure that, moving forward, the revitalization of the city is not just physical and focused on downtown, but also encompasses strengthening the power and capacities of neighborhoods to play an active role in shaping Hartford's future.

## **Assessment of Community Organizing and Resident Engagement Initiatives**

In order to assess the various efforts to involve Hartford residents in addressing issues which are central to them and their neighborhoods, and to think through how best to develop strong neighborhoods for the future, it is imperative to clear-up confusion by clarifying how the terms “resident engagement” and “community organizing” are used.

### Working definition of “resident engagement” or “citizen participation”:

“Resident engagement” is the process “of creating officially designated channels for involving residents in providing input into government decision-making and problem-solving and accessing government services. Participants monitor the neighborhood’s streets and public spaces on an ongoing basis, submitting information and complaints about specific problems to the appropriate liaisons within particular city agencies and departments...” They act “as the city’s eyes and ears”.<sup>1</sup>

The CCP program is premised on this model (although some of the PSCs also use a community organizing approach). It established useful officially recognized opportunities for citizens to meet with the police to express their concerns about crime and to make their priorities known. These forums had a significant impact on how police handled crime situations, changed the attitudes of both police and residents towards each other, and contributed to a reduction in crime. Such independent civic groups as Blue Hills Civic Association and elements of the Rising Star initiative also draw on this model of resident engagement.

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<sup>1</sup> Smock, Kristina. Democracy in Action: Community Organizing and Urban Change.

Working definition of “community organizing”:

Community organizing is the process of building an increasingly broadly based, democratic organization rooted in a low- to moderate-income community. Over time the goal is to build a large, well-disciplined organization with the membership, leadership, knowledge, vision, power, and capacity to strengthen their neighborhood’s social and economic fabric and make increasingly significant gains on vital issues. This requires a continuing process of actively reaching out, involving larger numbers of people, surfacing leaders and giving them training, increasing responsibility and authority, and helping them move into effective action on the issues that most concern them. The ultimate goal of community organizing is to transform the conditions that currently restrict opportunities for people who are too often left behind.

In Hartford today there are fewer examples of community organizing than there were in earlier days when the Asylum Hill Organizing Project and CHANE were in their beginning stages. Nonetheless, several of the CCP-funded groups were frequently cited by a range of persons we interviewed for good organizing – HART and early stages of organizing in West End, Parkville, and Asylum Hill. In particular, in the broader region, the Interfaith Coalition for Equity and Justice (ICEJ), a faith-based organizing initiative affiliated with the Gamaliel Foundation, has dozens of member congregations, including twenty in Hartford itself. And the national organizing network ACORN has recently come to Hartford.

As we have learned in conducting the assessment, a lack of common understanding of definitions creates confusion about which models and standards are being used. This makes it difficult to determine how the effectiveness of various groups should be judged and to discern whether and how the differing programs should relate to one another in creating increasingly vibrant and influential processes for involving residents in tackling the main issues they and their city face.

However, it is clear from our interviews,<sup>2</sup> that many leaders in the neighborhoods and in key positions in the city feel that it is vital that Hartford develop a stronger set of stable, sustainable organizations which are actively building the leadership, constituency, experience, and vision to be major players in revitalizing their neighborhoods and strengthening the city. For this reason, this assessment of current programs and future potential focuses in large part on the extent to which particular organizing approaches are creating the preconditions for Hartford’s neighborhoods to move to the next level in helping shape the city’s future.

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<sup>2</sup> See Appendix I for a complete listing of the persons we interviewed.

## SUMMARY Assessment of Comprehensive Community Partnership Program (CCP)

(NOTE: A thorough assessment of CCP, as well as shorter assessments of NRZs and Rising Star, are available as a separate appendix upon request.)

*Positive elements of the program include:*

- emphasis on residents setting the agenda;
- commitment to building on existing infrastructure of community organizations in establishing the problem-solving committees (PSCs);
- creation of a citywide monthly forum for residents to come together;
- regular productive meetings between local residents and police representatives;
- concept of three-legged triangle of residents/police department/other city agencies;
- introduction of paid organizers to help neighborhoods;
- provision of training and technical assistance.

*Aspects of the program that have hindered its effectiveness include:*

- lack of focus on building permanent, strong organizations out of PSCs;
- lack of clarity about what ‘neighborhood organizing’ means and therefore what organizers are being paid to do;
- uneven use of monthly CCP meetings to both share information *and* advance a citywide agenda;
- conflict inherent in role of City as partner that also holds purse strings and power;
- lack of supervision for some organizers, and conflict inherent in UCAN’s role as TA provider and ‘employer’ of some organizers;
- lack of organizing in the North End, bilingual organizing, organizing among neediest residents;
- emphasis on block watch model, which is not always the most effective way to organize neighborhoods;
- focus on public safety is critical, but other issues are also important to organize around;
- giving each neighborhood an organizer is untenable financially and does not promote sustainability, scale, and collaboration;
- lack of accountability throughout the program, including unclear lines of authority and no tracking of outcomes (until recently);
- need for more varied training and TA options in addition to the role played by UCAN;
- inconsistent and insufficient program financing, which has been detrimental to morale of residents and organizers.

Despite these challenges, the program has achieved some impressive results in its ten-year history:

- *Public safety:* reduction in crime rates; creation of ‘hot spots’ system; improved attitudes of police toward the neighborhoods and of community residents toward

the police department; and shared belief in community-oriented policing and government.

- *Resident engagement and collaboration:* establishment of PSCs in every neighborhood and development of new leaders; forum for citywide interaction that puts aside turf, race and class divisions; improved relations between residents and some city agencies; and collaboration across neighborhoods (such as West End/Parkville/Asylum Hill, and recent HART work with North End leaders).
- *Neighborhood victories:* examples are \$300,000 for boys and girls club in Asylum Hill; new community center in West End and removal of slumlord there.
- *Citywide victories:* examples are the establishment of Community Court; increase in the number of recruits being trained in community policing by the police academy.

### Neighborhood Revitalization Zones

NRZs have also played a substantial role in expanding resident engagement in recent years. They have become central to the official city planning process, seeking to foster physical and economic development through collaborative partnerships among all stakeholders, including city government, to engage in comprehensive planning. NRZs operate on a consensus rather than a community organizing model, and they therefore are best equipped to work on issues that invite little controversy or division among stakeholders, which include homeowners, tenants and landlords, citizens and government agencies, businesspeople and their employees and consumers. They are an important mechanism for neighborhood planning that could be more effective at implementing their goals with greater resources and more staff support. Hartford 2000 plays a valuable role by bringing the NRZs together to be a united voice and developing their capacities through trainings and workshops. NRZs could be more effective at resident engagement with greater outreach efforts, assisted in part by their leadership development programs, which are attracting more diverse participants. NRZs and community organizing efforts have different objectives and strategies, but both seek to improve neighborhoods and would benefit from mutual engagement and support.

Furthermore, many obstacles to stronger neighborhood organizing remain. Confusion about the purposes and roles of the different initiatives (CCP, NRZs, Rising Star) has bred feelings of competition and conflict, exacerbated by the constrained funding environment. Furthermore –

- The programs combined are not maximizing their potential for developing a series of powerful, effective, and influential community organizations in key sections of the city, particularly in North Hartford.
- The potential for citywide action on important neighborhood issues has not been fully realized.
- The need for more qualified and diverse community organizers is acute.
- The neighborhoods with the greatest need are perhaps the least organized.

However, the funding crisis that precipitated the decision to re-examine the CCP program creates an opportunity to put forth an exciting new vision for organizing in Hartford.

## **Analysis of Findings: The Case for Building Powerful, Multi-Neighborhood, Multi-Issue Organizations in Hartford**

Our interviews and review of several organizing and resident engagement initiatives in Hartford make us optimistic about the real potential for building on the assets we uncovered in our research. There is a visible, heart-felt pride in the city among many we interviewed. Key stakeholders appear deeply committed to making the capital city the best it can be and appreciate what Hartford has to offer. The City has established an ongoing commitment to neighborhood-oriented government and a renewed commitment to community-oriented policing. Attitudes of both police officers and the neighborhoods toward one another have improved, in part due to organizing and the regularized, officially sanctioned channels for meeting and collaboration that have been established. Hartford has a solid foundation of community-based organizations and other entities that play important complementary roles of neighborhood planning, civic engagement, provision of services, and community development. So many of the people we met show a sincere interest, knowledge, and enthusiasm for neighborhood organizing as another critical, community role. The combination of support for organizing from the City, the community foundation, and the United Way is unique in a city of Hartford's size, and is a significant asset that can be used to attract national funding interest.

Our investigation found many organizing strengths in Hartford. The CCP focus on resident agenda-setting that builds on existing organizations, and the flexibility to broadly define quality of life issues have allowed some very good resident-led organizing to occur. Several solid organizers have emerged and received training and support, allowing them to grow and in some cases even mentor other organizers. The development of increasingly diverse neighborhood leadership has been a critically important investment, with the result that several former community leaders became organizers themselves.

Neighborhood organizing in Hartford helped turn the city around after a period of increased drug and gang activity. According to former Interim Police Chief Pawlina, the PSCs contributed significantly to reducing crime and improving public safety. "Their high point was in 1999, and Hartford had its lowest crime rate in 25-30 years that year." CCP also fostered multi-neighborhood and citywide collaboration, cutting across class, race, and turf issues to win the Community Court, a million-dollar investment in a new approach to misdemeanor crimes. Collaboration across neighborhoods continues today, exemplified by the relationship among West End, Parkville, and Asylum Hill, as well as recent HART-initiated citywide efforts to secure more police officers.

Hartford is in an excellent position to build on these strengths and take organizing to the next level. Many of the stakeholders we interviewed cited HART, CHANE, and AHOP in their heydays as examples of the kind of organizing that is needed in Hartford. Looking at these examples and drawing on our experience working in other parts of the country, we believe that developing cohesive, multi-issue, constituency-led organizations is a prime requisite of effective neighborhood organizing and what is most needed now in Hartford. Whatever strategies are undertaken to support organizing in the City, the goal should be to foster an environment conducive to, and provide adequate resources for,

creating and/or strengthening powerful, representative, and highly competent organizations – rooted in the community and accountable to residents – that make organizing their central means for getting things done for their constituencies and the City as a whole. A key focus of the work of these organizations should be deep engagement with leadership development strategies that build on the resident-led efforts we have seen in Hartford but also go well beyond them.

Community organizing does not need to follow a single track or approach to be effective, but, to have major impact, it does need to result in the creation of organizations with the volunteer leadership, staff, resources, and technical assistance required to tackle the central issues. Developing sustainable power is crucial to winning lasting community benefits.

Our working definition of “community organizing” is:

The process of building an increasingly powerful, broad-based, democratic, independent organization rooted in and representative of its community (race, ethnicity, class, gender, age) –

- ◆ that has a vision for the transformation of its community and engages in multi-issue organizing to achieve systemic change;
- ◆ that engages in the ongoing process of actively reaching out, involving large numbers of people, surfacing leaders and giving them training and increasing responsibility and authority, and helping them move into effective action on the issues that most concern them; and
- ◆ that builds its membership, leadership, knowledge, power, and capacity over time, so it can make increasingly significant gains on the issues it cares about.

There are a number of important reasons why building powerful, multi-neighborhood, multi-issue organizations is crucial for enhancing Hartford’s future:

- They provide social fabric and greater stability (as the PSCs and CBOs have shown) in a city that has extreme poverty.
- They provide city officials and major institutions with one representative group to relate to for a particular geographic area, making it far easier to involve people in planning and problem solving and in collaborations on particular issues or projects. In this way they can be a more effective and efficient vehicle for resident engagement.
- They build self-help capacity – such as block clubs, block watches, clean-ups, and alerts on public safety – while giving every resident a reason and means to be involved in improving city life.
- They develop bigger projects that can be an asset to the city – such as overcoming discrimination and creating jobs through the Jobs Funnel, creating partnerships for better schools through the Learning Corridor, and developing more holistic approaches to criminal justice like the Community Court.
- They can help ensure the efficient use of limited resources – targeted to the projects and activities that residents find make the biggest difference (for



example PSCs determined that raucous parties and vandalism were more detrimental than nonviolent robberies).

- They can increase Hartford’s power to get policy reforms and resources needed in the city, by marshalling their constituency on issues like securing equitable funding for schools from the State, with backing from suburbs in the region.
- They can develop leaders who are vital to Hartford’s future, as organizing groups have already done with leaders like Mayor Perez, Jim Boucher, Yolanda Rivera, Marie Kirkley-Bey, Dawn Fuller, Hyacinth Yennie, and Karen Cato Calloway.

Looking at the challenges faced by high poverty cities around the country, we would argue that many of Hartford’s problems will require regional and statewide solutions in order to distribute resources more equitably over the long term. Hartford will need powerful community organizations that can effectively partner with other organizations in the suburbs and throughout the state to engage in region-wide and eventually statewide organizing to bring constituency views and voices to policy debates. The type of organizing that occurred around the recent school equity fight involving Hartford groups as well as ICEJ and others in the suburbs is an important precedent that can be built on in the future.

Our interviews underscored the critical importance of organizing and meaningfully engaging young people in greater numbers in working for Hartford’s future. The city already has a number of youth development and youth leadership initiatives underway, and these need to be complemented by significant youth organizing and “youth leadership development for change” strategies so that young people – especially in communities of color – can participate in strategizing and mobilizing for positive social change as part of mutually responsive, intergenerational efforts. There are already promising examples of youth organizing to build on, including work HART has done and the West End Civic Association’s current youth organizing around school suspension issues.

Hartford’s powerful, multi-issue, intergenerational organizations of the future also need to be “learning organizations” in the fullest sense if they are to continuously grow in effectiveness and influence. In a fully participatory manner involving their constituencies, they will need to invest in building knowledge about the fundamental causes of neighborhood and city problems they seek to address, open themselves to involvement with others in pursuing meaningful solutions, and make learning through trial and error, reflection and systematic assessment integral to their strategic planning and decision making. Developing standards for community organizing is a piece of the learning and self-assessment process, and examples of these are included in the Appendices. Another piece of the process is to have an approach to evaluation that understands community organizing and incorporates organizational learning and growth as central goals. A third piece is the availability of ongoing training and technical assistance that supports learning within and across organizations, organizers, and leaders.

## **Hand in Hand: Creating Funding and Capacity-Building Systems to Strengthen Community Organizing in Hartford**

In the following section we briefly lay out a vision emerging from our interviews and assessment to guide future support for organizing in Hartford. It centers on building powerful, multi-neighborhood, multi-issue, resident-led organizations that will use organizing to create systemic change and demonstrably improve communities. We also provide recommendations for how to support and implement this vision. The recommendations build not only on what we have found through our work to date in Hartford, but also on a review of several collaborative funding and capacity-building models (included in appendices, available upon request) – and our experience with and knowledge of notable systems for supporting organizing around the country.

**We see two essential elements to a long-term strategy for strengthening community organizing in Hartford – expanded funding, and intensive capacity-building.**

We recommend the creation of a new nonprofit organization that would provide both forms of help to support much stronger organizing in the city, especially in very low-income communities and among people of color. It would have two key committees – one of funders, the other mixing funders and others whose experience and commitment would be invaluable in developing long-range strategies and immediate programs to build strong organizing groups in Hartford.

The committee of funders would operate as a “Funding Collaborative”, with each contributing to a growing pool of funding for community organizing in the city. The Funding Collaborative would expand financial support for grassroots organizations, help current supporters attract others to support this vital work, and help all of these funders collaborate in developing investment strategies that will maximize their impact in building strong grassroots organizing groups in Hartford.

A second committee would plan and oversee the capacity-building side of this dual strategy. It would engage a cross-section of people who are committed to and highly informed about community organizing to work together to create and implement new long-range strategies for developing strong community organizing groups in key communities throughout Hartford. Its role would be to ensure these groups receive the expert training, technical assistance, and peer learning opportunities they need to rapidly expand their power, capacity, ability to work together, and impact.

## **Recommendations for Strengthening Neighborhood Organizing in Hartford**

Our recommendations are presented in brief, outline format to touch the key highlights. We look forward to fleshing them out in greater detail in consultation with the steering committee.

### **1. Overall Goal and Strategy of Funding Organizing**

- **We recommend that the primary goal of the funders be the building of powerful, resident-led, multi-issue organizations that can achieve increasingly significant neighborhood improvements on resident-defined issues and work together, and with others, to address citywide issues.**

The most effective way to achieve this goal, especially given limited resources, is to foster the development of incorporated, sustainable, multi-issue and multi-neighborhood organizations. There are countless examples of the benefits such organizations can bring at the neighborhood level. At the citywide level, the jobs funnel is an excellent example of what can be achieved through citywide collaboration rooted in organizing. The potential to achieve other equally effective solutions to resident concerns – and become an effective voice for urban constituencies at City Hall and in the State capitol – lies in a clear commitment to “community organizing” which goes well beyond resident engagement, and strong support to create and sustain permanent 501c3 organizations that work across more than one neighborhood. It is neither feasible nor desirable to create and sustain 17 different neighborhood organizing groups. The strategy of building several larger, more powerful organizations makes sense in both fiscal and impact terms. However, these larger organizations must also effectively organize and represent the lowest-income and neediest residents in the city.

- **We recommend that the systems that currently foster resident engagement and citizen participation be maintained and strengthened.**

Opportunities for regular, ongoing neighborhood input and communication with City agencies and the police department are critical to reducing crime and improving quality of life. We envision that these systems will continue, and that as strong, multi-issue, multi-neighborhood organizations are developed, they will use these routes for citizen participation to expand their impact and that they will join with others to improve these avenues for resident engagement in the future.

### **2. Design of New Structure to Support Organizing**

- **We recommend that a new entity be created to fund and strengthen community organizing in Hartford by increasing both funding and capacity-building support.**

This new entity should temporarily be housed at an existing nonprofit which sees its role as supporting the birth of a new vehicle for supporting organizing. Eventually this

entity should be spun off as an independent nonprofit. A Steering Committee composed of funders and others with organizing expertise and credibility would be responsible for planning and launching this new entity. The Steering Committee would supervise the initial staff and consultants during this beginning phase, and create twin committees to plan and launch the early funding and capacity-building work. Those committees would serve as the nuclei for ongoing committees that would be constituted when the new permanent structure is formed.

Early in its initial stage the emerging entity should employ a highly skilled, dynamic, and committed Executive Director with extensive experience in providing expert assistance to community organizing groups and with a long-range vision of how the collaborative can build much stronger organizing groups in Hartford.

#### The Funding Collaborative for Community Organizing:

Following the precedent of other funding collaboratives, the committee launching the new Funding Collaborative for Community Organizing (FC) would work to expand financial support for organizing in the city and region, while also helping various funders improve the quality of their grant-making in this area. The Funding Collaborative Committee would include representatives of all institutions that contribute funds to the Collaborative.

As with the Neighborhood Support Collaborative, there are several advantages to having this structure—it provides a forum for shared learning, making grant-making decisions, attracting more funders and more resources, and strengthening members' commitment to Hartford neighborhoods and to organizing as a community change strategy. Experience with collaboratives in Hartford and other cities demonstrates how the experience of funders working with their peers in this way creates an especially strong sense of shared investment and thus strengthens support for the long haul.

#### The Capacity-Building Committee:

Money alone is not the answer to building strong, capable organizations. Serious attention must also be given to capacity-building, and this requires concerted, carefully thought through measures for providing groups with the best possible training and consulting help and with opportunities to work together on broader agendas. As we envision it, a Capacity-Building Committee (CBC) would enlist “alumni” of community organizing groups and other key strategists in joining with a few key funders in thinking through how best to do this. By reaching beyond the funding community for other leaders who can help build a participatory process for devising long-term strategies for strengthening organizing, the committee would be in an excellent position to build strong support systems, foster learning, and influence funders, grassroots groups and others in the joint search for new ways to strengthen Hartford through bottom-up processes. It would be composed of a cross-section of people who are committed to and highly informed about community organizing in Hartford, including strategies for –

- strengthening groups that are currently organizing neighborhood residents and
- supporting the creation of new multi-neighborhood, multi-issue organizations where people now lack such vehicles for representation and influence.

Its long-range goal would be the existence of strong, influential, and constructive community organizing groups in all of Hartford's lower income neighborhoods.

With a dynamic, highly skilled and creative Executive Director who knows organizing "cold", the CBC would then oversee a long-term capacity-building effort combining the training, consulting, peer learning and opportunities they need to rapidly expand their power, capacity, ability to work together, and impact on broader issues and concerns. This would add great new cooperation, talent and energy to the challenging task of moving community organizing in Hartford to a new level

It is vital that both financial and capacity-building assistance be provided from the earliest stages. Working through a single entity, under the governance of a single board and sharing staff, these interrelated efforts could tap the advantages of giving funders a collaborative structure through which to work with their peers, while also benefiting from bringing a cross-section of committed and experienced supporters of organizing together to develop long-term strategies and ensure that an innovative mix of forms of capacity-building help is available to both emerging and more experienced groups.

The CBC would oversee the capacity-building efforts and be involved in a serious learning effort that would have two components: one—a continuing analysis of city, regional, state, and national trends, and their implications for Hartford; the other—an ongoing assessment process that fosters learning about what's going well, what isn't, what needs attention, and what steps should be taken next. This would be a formative and participatory learning process designed to lead to midcourse corrections and continuing refinement of plans.

Working with staff, the Committee would also plan and oversee the creative side of the programming—developing new programs to explore areas needing special attention, such as the development of organizations and organizers in the very lowest income areas and in monolingual Spanish areas; and youth organizing, especially among very poor kids, perhaps tied into a high school curriculum (drawing on models here and elsewhere such as the ACORN High Schools, and perhaps fitting in with the new Public Service Academy). It might also explore relationships with ongoing educational programs at Trinity College, the University of Hartford, and the University of Connecticut and/or possible new offering on community organizing at Capitol City Community College to take advantage of its access to students from lower income neighborhoods.

This model will only work if the non-funder representatives chosen for the Capacity-Building Committee understand organizing, are well-respected, and can truly be impartial. Anyone who is clearly promoting an isolated agenda or does not have the experience or skills to play an active role in shaping the future directions of the

Committee will cause more harm than good. In addition, the staff will need to have a special combination of skills and experience to be able to devote concentrated attention to these tasks, doing some direct technical assistance, effectively supervising others doing TA, fundraising from outside the city, and engaging in creative program development.

While the work of the Board and committees would need to be intensive during the formative stages of this effort, after the first 3-6 months we envision a much less demanding time commitment by members, such as participation in quarterly day-long meetings.

#### Summary of Proposed Structure and Responsibilities:

After an initial period in which the new initiative would be housed in another nonprofit, eventually it would be spun off as a tax-exempt nonprofit corporation with its own Board and the twin committees. The Board would be quite small, perhaps 5-7 members, composed of funders and other resource people.

The Funding Collaborative Committee's composition—

- Membership includes all institutions that contribute funds to the Collaborative.

Funding Collaborative Duties—

- Makes final funding decisions for grants to groups and TA providers.
- Conducts outreach to and recruitment of potential new funders.
- Develops and pursues “outside” funding strategies.
- Provides a forum for learning more about Hartford, its neighborhoods, and citywide concerns as well as successful approaches to organizing in Hartford and other cities.
- Explores regional and statewide issues as they affect Hartford.

The Capacity-Building Committee's Composition—

- Membership includes several members of the Funders Collaborative and a majority of non-funders.
- Non-funder members ideally are people who are respected for their commitment to organizing, racial, ethnic, and gender diversity, long-range view, and balance of competing interests. We envision that at least some of these persons would come from the neighborhoods.
- Possible size of the Committee could be two or three funders and five to seven other resource people.

Capacity-Building Committee's Duties—

- Defines community organizing and develops standards for organizing.
- Creates a long-term plan to develop strong community organizing groups in Hartford.
- Creates and oversees a multifaceted system for developing the capacity of current organizing groups and creating new ones in such areas as North Hartford that now lack organizing groups.

- Drafts the process and criteria for awarding grants for the Funding Collaborative to consider adopting.
- Reviews funding proposals and makes recommendations to the Funders Collaborative for grants to groups and TA providers.
- Creates and facilitates learning forums for Funding Collaborative.
- Establishes a Training Cooperative that develops a training curriculum, which takes full advantage of the knowledge and skills of people throughout the Hartford region and elsewhere who can provide community organizers in Hartford with the training they need and want; representatives of organizing groups would be involved in development of this cooperative curriculum and identifying trainers for each component of the program.
- Facilitates monthly meetings of organizers and leaders to discuss issues of common concern, engage in educational program on trends and issues in the city and region, explore approaches from other places, and look at opportunities to work together on issues and to otherwise collaborate.
- Supports development of new programs to meet the needs of Hartford's neighborhoods (for example, programs to support youth organizing, recruit more diverse organizers into the field, and address re-entry of formerly incarcerated).
- Creates and sustains evaluation and organizational learning processes with grantees, as well as for the funding and capacity-building efforts
- Modifies and expands the program over time.

Executive Director of the Collaborative:

Qualifications—

- Outstanding senior experience as organizer and/or organizational development specialist committed to organizing (minimum 10 years unless has other relevant experience and qualifications).
- Familiarity with diverse approaches to organizing; experience with multi-racial and low-income organizing, and building coalitions and alliances.
- Experience in organizational development, strategic planning, and fundraising.
- Ability to engage in big picture, strategic thinking about the future of organizing in Hartford.
- Preferably familiar with Hartford neighborhood organizing scene.

Duties—

- Provides staff leadership in developing strategies for funding and capacity-building and implementing pursuit of the organization's program development goals.
- Provides hands-on organizational development support to grantees.
- Helps grantees develop training and TA Cooperative.
- Assists in creating learning forums for Funders Collaborative, the capacity-building efforts, and other important audiences

### 3. Accountability, Performance, and Evaluation

- **We recommend that the Capacity-Building Committee clarify the key elements of community organizing, adopt a set of standards for organizing, and develop an evaluation and organizational learning process that helps strengthen local groups, the CBC, and the Funding Collaborative.**

The Capacity-Building Committee and the grantees themselves will play important roles in ensuring accountability and evaluating performance. The Committee's responsibilities would include defining "organizing" and adopting standards for organizing. This would help overcome the current confusion between "organizing" and "civic engagement". More importantly, it would provide standards for then monitoring progress, assessing success and refining future plans.

Several funders that support community organizing have developed good materials that set standards for organizing. Some organizing groups have developed their own internal performance measures as well. (Examples of each are in the appendices, available upon request.) The monthly meetings of organizers and leaders will provide opportunities for monitoring how groups are doing. The Training Cooperative will be an important mechanism to identify skill gaps and increase learning, thereby improving performance. These are some of the many ways that a culture of organizational learning can be infused throughout the structure.

Other mechanisms can be put in place to strengthen overall accountability as well. Developing a semi-annual self-assessment and reporting system will allow for the enforcement of accountability by grantees. The selection of an outside evaluator who has an in-depth understanding of community organizing will allow for a formative and participatory evaluation process that facilitates mid-course corrections and enhancement of the grantees' capacities.

Funding guidelines can require that each grantee have at least one senior organizer who will manage the organizing project and supervise new or less experienced organizers. The funding guidelines can also provide clear guidance on job qualifications and pay ranges for each to help ensure that the staff are sufficiently skilled and compensated.

This initiative is of enormous importance to the future of Hartford. It therefore will be critical that the strategic leaders of the initiative – funders, grassroots leaders, and others who are highly knowledgeable and strategic about organizing to bring about positive change – have assistance in devising a process of evaluation and organizational learning which is geared specifically to giving them real-time feedback on what is working well, what isn't, and what new factors have intervened to block progress or open up new opportunities. If well designed, this could be of enormous help to the Capacity-Building Committee and its partners in the community and donor worlds by enabling them to keep making course corrections to strengthen their efforts. It would also help



keep people involved in the CBC by creating an engaging learning environment which participants would find stimulating, useful, and an additional reason for staying involved.

#### **4. Funding Strategy**

- **We recommend that initially the new entity develop an RFP process to fund at least one entity or collaborative effort in each of three geographic areas – the South End, the central city, and North Hartford. It would also develop a process to provide small grants to smaller, more nascent efforts.**

Criteria for funding would include, at a minimum:

- Multi-neighborhood organizing (to avoid shotgun weddings, the groups should show evidence of prior collaboration);
- Multi-issue focus;
- Evidence of real power-based organizing;
- Ability to work collectively toward citywide change;
- Plan for organizing in very poor neighborhoods;
- Extra points for willingness to collaborate actively with other neighborhood entities, such as PSCs, NRZs, and Rising Stars, including being open to possibly incorporating these committees into the umbrella organizations.
- Extra points for solid leadership development plans.
- Extra points for strategies that involve young people.

It is critical that this new process builds on the organizing that is already going well and takes it to the next level. Many people we interviewed cited HART at its height as an example of the kind of inclusive organizing, with serious leadership development, accountability to the grassroots, and ability to produce major gains --that Hartford's neighborhoods need. It will be important that good organizing efforts currently underway are not jeopardized under the new structure. In addition, there appears to be increasing collaboration in some parts of the city between adjacent neighborhoods and among PSCs, NRZs and others. These efforts should be encouraged and may provide a good foundation for building new community organizations.

At the same time, special attention must be paid to areas of the city that do not have strong (or any) organizing groups. Thus North Hartford requires a different approach. Stakeholders pointed out to us the great importance of North Hartford having at least one strong community organization, given the concentration of poverty, high violent crime rates, environmental hazards, and other pressing issues. There has not been strong organizing in North Hartford in over two decades, and organizing is needed to complement the physical development and other work being undertaken by the City, private institutions, and ONE/CHANE as a CDC. While we know that the neighborhoods are now fragmented, with many territorial conflicts, we recommend that one or two consultants (preferably reflecting the racial composition of North Hartford) be retained to do pre-organizing work and to ascertain whether there are sufficient numbers of emerging and older leaders who are willing to work together to create a new organizing effort. If

so, steps should be taken to create a sponsoring committee for a new organizing group. Funds should be set aside to seed that new organization, if there is a decision to create it, and to hire initial staff.

Ideally the FC would make long-term funding commitments to community groups. One way to maximize the assurance of funding while taking into account the reluctance of some funders to make grants of three or more years would be to make a two-year commitment and then, after a review of the first year's experience, authorize a third year of funding to grantees that have achieved sufficient progress. Over time, as resources allow, other community organizing groups would be supported as well.

Smaller grants should be available to sponsor nascent organizing efforts in some of the unorganized areas throughout the city or where existing PSCs, NRZs and other entities want to come together to form an organizing group. This could resemble Seattle's Neighborhood to Neighbor or other "neighborhood small grant programs" developed by community foundations with support from the Charles Stewart Mott Foundation.

Ideally the new entity would be 'agnostic' in its support of organizing models, including those associated with such organizing networks as NPA, IAF, ACORN, PICO, and Gamaliel – as long as grant applicants meet the criteria for receiving funds.

**In this scenario, the positive elements and connections that exist in the current CCP program would be maintained and enhanced.**

- We envision that whether particular PSCs continue to exist in their present form or morph into something new – this would probably vary from neighborhood to neighborhood – resident leaders would be involved in developing the proposals for multi-neighborhood organizing and setting the agenda for issues they want to work on.
- PSCs and NRZs also would be eligible to apply for seed money to build new broader organizing groups which become multi-issue, multi-neighborhood, and institute a disciplined process of organizing a constituency and developing leaders. It is possible that some PSCs that are and will continue to be focused on civic engagement rather than organizing, would decide instead to merge with their NRZs (CSS/CON already has) in order to consolidate their leadership, broaden their impact, and continue to be supported through supplemental funding for Hartford 2000.
- All of the organizers and leaders we met with indicated that public safety and quality of life issues remain at the top of the residents' priority list, so these issues will continue to be a primary concern for organizing.
- There was broad agreement among neighborhood leaders as well as police officials on the importance of maintaining a formalized collaborative relationship on crime and safety issues. It is vital to continue all of the invaluable processes

that now foster good communication and common efforts between citizens and the police department. These include monthly neighborhood and citywide meetings between resident leaders, the police department and other city agencies – open to grantees and any other PSCs that want to come. It is, however, essential to revamp and revitalize those meetings to provide a more effective means of improving neighborhood-City relations and the delivery of services than the current monthly meetings, which have low attendance and lack strategic focus. The recent appointment of the permanent police chief, Patrick Harnett, provides an important focal point for these meetings, which can be a vehicle for neighborhoods to articulate their public safety agenda to the new chief.

## **5. Technical Assistance and Training Cooperative**

- **We recommend that training and technical assistance be provided through a combination of a new Training Cooperative and grants for technical assistance tailored to the needs of particular community groups.**

Each group receiving a grant would have a pot of funds available for technical assistance and training. The grantee would submit proposals, specifying the uses of the TA money and the TA/training provider to be used. We anticipate that some of the grantees would choose to continue receiving training from UCAN.

One of the notable assets of the Hartford region is the variety of people who have extensive experience in community organizing. There are many “alumni” who, after years of working in Clay Hill, Asylum Hill or another neighborhood, are now working elsewhere in the nonprofit sector or in private or public institutions. Collectively, they represent an enormous resource that should be tapped as support for strong community organizing expands.

It is also clear that the training needs of people in various neighborhood groups differ enormously. Some organizers are experienced but need highly experienced people to be coaches, mentors, and trainers so that they can learn new skills and be exposed to new ideas. Others are new to the work, from the neighborhoods or from local universities, and in need of training in the basics of organizing as well as an opportunity to get together periodically with their peers and trainers for reflection on their experience and peer support. The groups themselves are at various stages, quite strong in some cases and nascent or struggling in others. Some are parts of broader networks; others are independent and isolated.

Creation of a Training Cooperative as an integral part of the capacity-building support for organizing would enable groups in the city to maximize their access to the training they need and want. The cooperative would be part of the ongoing work of the Capacity Building Committee and the Executive Director, in partnership with the organizing groups. The cooperative approach would give people from different grassroots groups an opportunity to come together to decide – in dialogue with staff and others – what their primary training needs are. They could be involved in designing the

curriculum, choosing the main topics (such as conducting effective one-on-ones or involving churches more heavily in an organization), and then deciding which trainer or “alumnus” could best lead that part of the curriculum.

This model will ensure that organizers benefit from ongoing organizing TA and have the flexibility to draw on the organizing expertise available in Hartford as well as expertise from other parts of the country. The Cooperative could explore potential linkages with area post-secondary schools around curriculum development.

In addition to the informal mentorship anticipated between senior and junior organizers within organizations, there would be further mentorship through the coop. The cooperative could also serve as a forum for peer learning and exploration of joint work on issues.

In addition, the grantees will need extensive technical assistance that is tailored to the particular needs of each organization and is delivered by people who are chosen by the grassroots groups themselves, with recommendations made available at groups’ request. This individualized assistance should include access to people outside Hartford as well as in the region so that groups have access to the people they believe can be most helpful to them.

## 6. Financing and Budget

- **We recommend a fundraising target of \$1,000,000 to implement the new structure.**

In order to administer the Collaborative, and provide sufficient resources for organizing groups to hire and retain quality organizing staff and quality TA, the existing resources that support organizing must be enhanced. Our proposed budget is intended to direct the lion’s share of the resources directly to community organizations for operating support, technical assistance, and training. Funds for management of the collaborative will be limited to a lean staff (executive director and part-time administrative support), with some program development and evaluation. We believe that potential new funders – including national foundations – will want to participate in a visionary program that has the real potential to grow strong organizations.

### Annual Budget (fully-funded)

Large grants pool (the North Hartford portion would cover temporary consultant until ED could be hired for new organization)	\$ 475,000
Small grants pool (to seed nascent organizing)	\$ 50,000
Technical assistance pool (assumes \$50k x 3 grantees; TA to nascent groups; Training Coop)	\$ 200,000
Staffing and administration (includes director, part-time AA and other part-time staff/consultants, overhead)	\$ 150,000

Evaluation and organizational learning	\$ 75,000
Program development	\$ 50,000
<b>Total</b>	<b>\$1,000,000</b>

Minimum Start-Up Budget (First Year)

Large grants pool	\$300,000
Small grants pool (to seed nascent organizing)	\$ 25,000
Technical assistance pool (assumes \$25k x 3 grantees)	\$ 75,000
Staffing and administration (includes director, overhead)	\$100,000
Evaluation and organizational learning	\$ 25,000
Program development	\$ 25,000
<b>Total</b>	<b>\$550,000</b>

Projected Annual Revenue

Based on our discussions with potential funders, there is a lot of interest in funding a quality community organizing support program with strong standards and accountability. The unique situation of Hartford having support for organizing coming from the City, the community foundation and the United Way sends a strong message to other potential funders. Some local funders may be willing to participate if their contribution can be earmarked to serve a particular geographic location such as North Hartford, which is of great concern to the City, and/or, in the case of the Annie E. Casey Foundation, specific neighborhoods where this foundation is already invested.

Our experience in national fundraising leads us to believe that a strong case could be made for national foundations to invest in this new initiative if it is started with the level of ambition and creativity, quality of staff and quality of institutional and leadership commitment we are recommending, at least during the stage when initial capacity-building is so vital. Specific pieces of the program could attract national funders, such as leadership development, youth organizing, organizing on education or other specific issues, and evaluation and organizational learning.

*NOTE: In the listing of funders and amounts to follow, no one entity has committed a specific dollar amount (except the City) – these figures are meant to be illustrative of the potential to raise significant funds:*

Potential Funding:

City of Hartford	\$200,000 – 250,000
Hartford Foundation	\$250,000 – 500,000
United Way	\$ 50,000 – 100,000
Other sources*	\$200,000 – 350,000
<b>Projected Total</b>	<b>\$700,000 – 1,200,000</b>

The City of Hartford has indicated that it can commit \$200,000 per year and perhaps more for at least the first three years. The City is also committed to sustaining ongoing resident engagement through the Mayor's Office of Constituency Services.

\*'Other sources' could include: Hartford Courant Foundation, Travelers Foundation, UTC, Fleet/Bank of America, Northeast Utilities, The Hartford, Aetna, The Phoenix Foundation, Melville Trust, Fisher Foundation, Anthem Foundation, Annie E. Casey Foundation, Charles Stewart Mott Foundation, Ford Foundation, Discount Foundation, Catholic Campaign for Human Development (CCHD), Needmor Fund, other national and regional funders.

## 7. Transition Plan

- **We recommend a transition period through early 2005 in which CCP continues to be supported while the Funding Collaborative, Capacity-Building Committee, and staff get up and running.**

We envision the following key elements in the transition process:

CCP Transition—The CCP program as such is already in a state of transition, with interim funding being provided to maintain 8.5 organizers in some neighborhoods. In the next phase of this transition we recommend that the current organizers continue to be funded until the grant awards have been made, perhaps through early 2005. UCAN would also continue to be funded through that period with somewhat increased funding so that groups that desire its assistance will have access to help in preparing for the changes (i.e. respond to the RFP) and to meet UCAN's ongoing training needs. During this interim period UCAN should also help make the monthly citywide meetings more effective. With the new police chief now in place, the monthly meetings can be an opportunity for the neighborhoods to organize their public safety agenda and work with the new chief to help shape the city's community policing and crime prevention strategy.

Interim Committee—The three core funders (the City, Hartford Foundation for Public Giving, and United Way) would quickly choose three or four non-funders to work with them as an interim decision-making body. Roles of the interim committee would be to –

- Conduct outreach to other funders to participate in the new Funding Collaborative;
- Issue a call for nominations for non-funder representation on the permanent Capacity-Building Committee;
- Develop and issue the RFP, and manage the process for receiving proposals that will be considered and awarded through the new process outlined above, involving the CBC and the FC;
- Identify an interim 'home' (i.e. fiscal agent) for the initiative, preferably on 'neutral' turf;

- Identify and engage interim staff for the committee (most likely a consultant or temporary hire), and develop a job description and scouting plan for a permanent Executive Director;
- Take initial steps towards incorporating the new entity and seeking a 501(c)(3) tax exemption.

There would also be a transition process of outreach by the interim committee to the neighborhoods (PSCs, NRZs, others) to help them understand the new structure, where they may fit in the new structure, and how it will be beneficial to their communities in the long run. Coordination with the City would also be needed around transition from the CCP to the new system.

The interim committee would devote the first three months of the transition period to these areas. Ideally the Funding Collaborative and Capacity-Building Committee could be put in place during the fourth month so that the new entity could hire its Executive Director and the Funding Collaborative could award grants by the end of the transition period.

Transition costs—The existing outlay for CCP would be enhanced by \$10,000 through the transition phase to reflect a stepped up role by UCAN so that groups desiring its assistance during this phase would have full access to it. This would need to be supplemented by the cost of hiring a consultant or interim staff to help the committee carry out its functions until the new operation is operational, which could be in the range of an additional \$50,000.

Timeline—see attached Transition Timeline.

## **Conclusion**

Hartford has many great assets as well as serious challenges. Fortunately there is broad agreement on the depth of the crisis and on the solutions, including the need for a strong Mayor and strong neighborhoods, and for a period of capacity-building which is geared to maximizing the involvement of Hartford's residents to join with others in tackling the central issues the region faces.

To tap the potential for maximizing the contribution which “ordinary” residents make to the city and the region, further investment is necessary. It is time to build on the strengths of the city's best neighborhood efforts to build a set of powerful, constructive and highly effective organizations which, through community organizing, can contribute in major ways to transforming the neighborhoods and the city in general. This can be done by developing a Funders Collaborative through which new as well as current supporters of grassroots organizations can work together on an increasingly sophisticated strategy for building those organizations and fostering collaboration at the citywide, regional and state levels. It can be greatly enhanced by developing a Capacity-Building Committee to focus on the equally important non-funding challenges of building the power and capacity of grassroots groups. It would harness the knowledge and energies of

people with exceptional experience with community organizing and community change – people from outside the funding world as well as lead funders – in working together to develop that sophisticated strategy in concert with the Funders Collaborative and neighborhood leaders. It would also add critical expertise as well as opportunities for peer learning, peer support, and collaboration on policy issues and joint concerns.

With this investment and these institutions, Hartford will be far better positioned to meet its current challenges and to shape a more positive future.



## **Appendix -- List of People Interviewed**

Eddie Perez, Mayor of Hartford  
Lee Erdman, COO, City of Hartford  
George Jones, Hartford Police Department  
Rae Ann Palmer, Hartford Police Department  
Mark Pawlina, Former Acting Chief, Hartford Police Department  
Jim Boucher, member, City Council  
Mike Bangser, President, Hartford Foundation for Public Giving (HFPG)  
Chris Hall, Vice President for Programs and Special Projects, HFPG  
Hubert Sapp, Senior Program Officer, HFPG  
Paula Gilberto, United Way  
Kate Miller, Hartford Courant Foundation  
John Motley, Travelers Foundation  
Jack Mimnaugh, UCAN  
Alta Lash, Trinity Center for Neighborhoods (and UCAN)  
Lorenzo Jones, UCAN  
Jennifer Hadlock, West End Civic Association organizer  
Dawn Fuller, West End leader  
Jerry Maine, and other West End leaders (at Association meeting)  
Carl Dudley, Hartford Seminary and Chair WECA/NRZ  
Josh Laporte, Parkville organizer  
Karen Cato Calloway, Asylum Hill organizer  
Marilyn Rosetti, Director, HART  
Tara Parish, Lead Organizer, HART  
Charmaine Craig, HART leader  
Lois Ross, Blue Hills Civic Association organizer  
Thirman Milner, Interim Executive Director, ONE/CHANE  
Naomi McCoy, Upper Albany Neighborhood Collaborative  
Ann Pratt, Interfaith Coalition for Equity and Justice  
Andrea Pereira, Hartford LISC  
Linda Bayer, Hartford 2000  
Bernadine Silvers, Chair of Hartford 2000 and President of CSS/CON  
Kathy Kosmaler, Co-chair, South End NRZ  
Hyacinth Yennie, Chair, Barry Square NRZ  
Jackie Fongemie, Behind the Rocks leader  
Edie Lacey, Chair, Frog Hollow NRZ  
Francesca Reale, Co-chair, South Green NRZ  
Helen Nixon, Northeast Revitalization Association/NRZ  
Carl Williams, Southend Neighborhood Revitalization Association/NRZ  
Glen Geathers, Project Manager, Hartford Economic Development Commission  
Don Poland, Neighborhoods of Hartford, Inc.  
Bob Kantor, Fannie Mae  
Marie Kirkley-Bey, Connecticut House of Representatives  
Yolanda Rivera, Executive Director, Hartford Construction Jobs Initiative  
Ken Johnson, Executive Director, NINA

Enid Rey, Village for Families and Children  
Garland Yates, Annie E. Casey Foundation  
Eunice Leitzing, Director, Neighbor to Neighbor, Seattle, WA  
Ann Sherrill, Executive Director, Baltimore Neighborhood Collaborative, Baltimore, MD  
Irene Baldwin, Executive Director, Association For Neighborhood Housing and  
Development, New York, NY  
Rick Cohen, Executive Director, National Committee for Responsive Philanthropy,  
Washington, DC  
Jean Rudd, former Executive Director, the Woods Fund, Chicago, IL  
Henry Allen, Executive Director, The Hyams Foundation, Boston, MA  
Spence Limbocker, Executive Director, Neighborhood Funders Group, Washington, DC  
Jane Becker, consultant to the Chicago Community Organizing Initiative, Chicago, IL

## **Additional Appendices (available upon request)**

### **I. Assessment of Community Organizing and Resident Engagement Initiatives**

- CCP, NRZs, Rising Star

### **II. Funding Collaborative Models**

- Hartford Neighborhood Development Support Collaborative, Initiative for Neighborhood and Citywide Organizing (NYC), Baltimore Neighborhood Collaborative, Neighbor to Neighbor (Seattle)

### **III. Definitions of Organizing and Organizing Standards**