INTRODUCTION

Getting the Most from This Book

At the end of his long career as a leadership scholar and advisor to four U.S. presidents, John W. Gardner issued a challenge and a plea for community leadership:

> I keep running into highly capable people all over this country who literally never give a thought to the well-being of their community. And I keep wondering who gave them permission to stand aside! I'm asking you to issue a wake-up call to those people—a bugle call right in their ear. And I want you to tell them that this nation could die of comfortable indifference to the problems that only citizens can solve. Tell them that.[1]

This book was written because there are people like you who have heard the "bugle call." You are not willing to let our neighborhoods, communities, or nation "die of comfortable indifference." You attend those early morning and late night meetings to determine what needs to be in the community. You give up your time and energy to make things happen, and you struggle to get others involved.

This book will support you in those important tasks.

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[1] John Gardner, unpublished speech presented to the San Jose Rotary Club, September 2001, quoted in Sanford Cloud, "Dealing with the Unfinished Business of America: Fighting Bias, Bigotry, and Racism in the Twenty-first Century," University of Arkansas at Little Rock, 2004. Retrieved October 12, 2005, from http://www.ualr.edu/cpsdept/bridgingthedivide/cloud_whitepaper.html.

Insights from the
Blandin Community Leadership Program

The Community Leadership Handbook responds to requests from community leaders and community development programs to share ideas and tools from the Blandin Community Leadership Program (BCLP). This residential training program includes a five-day retreat and two follow-up sessions over a six- to eight-month period.

BCLP was developed by a team of people with backgrounds in sociology, psychology, communications, adult education, business community development, government, and economic development. They've conducted BCLP since 1985 for over four thousand participants, testing and refining the content along the way. One result of this program is in your hands right now.

The heart of our approach to community leadership is the adage (paraphrased): You can give people some fish and feed them for a day. Or you can teach them to fish and they will feed themselves for a lifetime. Therefore, our program aims to build capacity—that is, to develop people's skills in working with each other so that they can address a community's opportunities and problems.

BCLP challenges the "myth of the facilitator." This myth holds that to get anything done, you need a facilitator from outside your community—an expert with a bag of tricks who can get people working together in productive ways. Instead, we assume that community members can tackle the job themselves. Using your own skills and employing the right tools, you and your neighbors can move your community forward. *The Community Leadership Handbook* highlights many of these tools.

Community leadership comes with a job description

There are many definitions of leadership. We define a **community leader** as a person who works with others to develop and sustain the health of the community. This definition seems simple and straightforward. But experienced community leaders know that in practice it is quite complex.

The job description of community leaders—to work with others to develop and sustain the health of the community—includes two elements.

The first comes from the question, Leadership for what? We answer that *the purpose of community leadership is to develop and sustain a healthy community.* A **healthy community** is a place where all people can meet their economic, social, physical, cultural, and spiritual needs; work together for the common good; and participate in creating their future.

Note that this definition refers to community in geographic terms, as an area that you could locate on a map. This could be anything from a single city block, to a small town, to an unincorporated rural region, to an entire city. People sometimes speak about other

kinds of communities—such as an online community or a community of scientists. However, our use of the word **community** describes people who share a particular place and all the resources located there.

Also note that leadership is not an end in itself but a means to something else. In general, leadership is a way to produce a result—not a unique set of traits or a specialized job. *Community leadership occurs when anyone, regardless of their official position or lack of it, works to develop and sustain the health of their community.* Think of leadership as a job that's defined by what people *do* rather than by their personality or position. You may never apply for a paid or volunteer position that's titled "community leader." Yet you become one whenever you take on the functions that a community leader fulfills.

The second element of the job description is captured by the saying, "Leadership: You have to do it yourself, but you can't do it alone." The "you have to do it yourself" part says that leadership means recognizing an issue or opportunity—one that is so critical to a community's health that you must be involved. It is so important that you feel compelled to take some type of action. And the "you can't do it alone" part says that leadership is about working with and through others.

To understand this point, consider a simple case. Picking up the litter along your street by yourself may be good citizenship, but it is not community leadership. Yet if picking up litter along the street leads others to do the same, or if you organize others to help pick up litter, then you are exercising community leadership.

Some definitions and premises

Community leader: a person who works with others to develop and sustain the health of the community. This definition rests on several key ideas:

- In general, leadership is not an end in itself, but a means to something else. It is not a set of traits or a special position.
- Community leadership occurs when *anyone* works to develop and sustain a healthy community.
- Community leaders are identified by what they *do* rather than by their personality or official position.
- Communities usually don't need outside leaders or facilitators to make things happen. Community

members, using their own skills and employing certain tools, can bring people together and move the community forward.

Healthy community: a place where all people can meet their economic, social, physical, cultural, and spiritual needs; work together for the common good; and participate in creating their future.

Community: people who share a particular place and all the resources located there.

Community leadership is *not* rocket science!

Communities are changing. They are more racially and ethnically diverse, more urbanized, and more integrated into the global economy. The meaning of the word "family" is being transformed because of the new ways that we form households. And an increasing proportion of our population is now age sixty-five or older.

These changes make community life more complicated. As our population becomes more diverse, our communities must deal with a variety of traditions, values, and viewpoints that can seem merely different from each other at best—and directly opposed at worst.

Commentators on the nightly news (and neighbors in the next office) remind us of deepening divisions in religious beliefs, political philosophy, and economic status. The changing makeup of households creates different patterns of consumption, different expectations for public services, and different types of participation in community life.

Not only is our population changing: The ways we get things done to provide needed services and regulate community activities is also being transformed. As far back as 1978, sociologist Roland Warren described what he called the "great change" in American communities.[2] This change is still under way, and it has several dimensions.

- Greater division of labor: more types of specialized jobs and occupations
- Greater differences in interests and association: for example, more special interest or special purpose community and civic groups
- Increasing systems that relate to the larger society: more ties to state and national governments, and more links to economic conditions across the nation and throughout the world
- Increased bureaucracy: more government agencies to provide more services and regulate a growing number of activities
- Changing values: greater emphasis on individualism, financial success, and consuming material goods

In short, what's driving this change is specialized activity and fragmented relationships. To get something done—even if it seems simple—community leaders have to deal with more individuals and more groups, each with their own "take" on things.

Diversity can be a source of creativity and strength. It can also be a community leadership challenge. All of us want to have happy and healthy children, to have our elders well cared for, and to have safety and security for ourselves. Yet we may discover great differences in what all this means to other people and who is responsible to provide it. We may all value families, for instance, but disagree sharply about what or who makes up a family.

[2] R. L. Warren, *The Community in America* (Chicago: Rand McNally, 1978).

The challenge is finding a way to manage these differences so that individuals and groups work together on building a healthy community. If community leadership were always a paid position, this challenge might qualify leaders for hazardous duty pay!

Community Example: Skateboard Park [3] _____

A local boy had been critically injured when a car struck him as he was skateboarding on a city street. It was time to build a skateboard park. Shirley and Leticia thought the idea was a good one, and the task seemed relatively simple. As parents of skateboarders and friends of the mother of the injured youth, they agreed to lead the effort to make the park a reality and to do so before another tragedy took place.

Within a few days, they talked to the mayor who said that a city-owned lot was available. They got two of the largest businesses in the area to agree to cover the cost of design and materials and organized a cadre of volunteers to do the actual construction.

At that point, the complexity of community life caught up with them. A series of events slowed the process down to a snail's pace:

- The city attorney advised them that the city's liability insurance would not be adequate for a skateboard park on city property. The chief of police sent a memo to the mayor and city council stating that an increased youth presence and activity in that neighborhood could be problematic and require more attention from her officers
- The local economic development group and Chamber of Commerce pointed out that several years earlier the City Planning Department had designated that lot as a business development site
- The City Park and Recreation Department was not sure if they had the staff to run the park

In addition, the "Y" raised the concern that the park's location was across town from them. This could have a negative impact on the "Y's" youth programming, which was a major interest of the private foundation that provided a considerable part of the "Y's" funding.

Shirley and Leticia took a step back and formed a steering committee composed of key stakeholders—parents, the city, the chamber, and the "Y." Eventually, all the major issues were successfully addressed. The park was built and opened two years after the original proposed completion date.

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[3] The Community Examples found throughout this book are based on the experiences of Blandin Community Leadership Program participants. In some of the examples, details from more than one community have been combined.

The example above describes a situation that leaders often face. It reminds us that community leaders must deal with growing specialization, complexity, and interdependence. Making the skateboard park a reality required

- Legal advice from the city attorney's office
- Police officers to ensure safety and security
- Help from the City Park and Recreation Department to operate the park over time
- Support from the "Y," a source of future volunteers and funding

The involvement and support of these groups could not be taken for granted. Community leaders had to gain that support by dealing directly with each group.

Community leadership is about taking action in a changing, complex, interconnected world. In this world, no one has all the answers. No one has all the authority. Almost everyone has a different agenda. And at any given moment, everyone has a dozen different things to do other than what you would like them to do.

That's why we say community leadership isn't rocket science—it's a lot more difficult than that!

What You'll Find in This Book

The Community Leadership Handbook distills the essence of many theories into tools and techniques that you can use. The emphasis is on taking action, not on becoming an expert in politics, psychology, or sociology. The material is divided into four major parts.

PART ONE: Three Core Competencies for Community Leadership

Here you will find an overview of the three main competencies, or skills, needed to fulfill your job description as a community leader:

- Framing ideas
- Building social capital
- Mobilizing resources

Developing any one of these competencies will enhance your effectiveness as a community leader. However, your community project will truly ignite real change as you learn to combine all three. In community leadership, the sum of the core competencies truly yields more impact than any one of the parts.

PART TWO: Tools for Framing Ideas

Part Two presents ways to define opportunities, challenges, and strategies. Look here for techniques to help your community groups develop compelling vision statements, settle on clear priorities, and set challenging but achievable goals. Tools include

1. **Identifying Community Assets.** This is a process for pulling diverse parts of the community together to discover its opportunities and strengths—and how they can be enhanced.

2. **Analyzing Community Problems.** Reaching an agreement on what the "problem" is can be one of the biggest barriers to getting something done in the community. This tool gives a step-by-step group process for defining problems.

3. **Accessing Community Data.** This tool provides a list of resources and procedures to help you find relevant facts and figures about your community—economic, demographic, and more.

4. **Doing Appreciative Inquiry.** Here is a way to focus on *what* is working in your community and *why.* Planning for the future can maintain these strengths. Appreciative Inquiry breaks the cycle of frustrating and discouraging conversations about how bad things are in a community.

5. **Visioning.** Visioning means answering key questions: What do we want the future to be like? and Why do we want the future to be that way? This tool gives the basic steps for producing a clear, compelling direction for a neighborhood's or community's future.

6. **Translating Vision into Action.** Using the processes explained in this tool, groups can advance their vision for a healthy community through priorities and goals that focus their effort and energy.

PART THREE: Tools for Building and Using Social Capital

Effective community leadership pays attention to not only *what* gets done but also *how* it gets done. Part Three explains individual skills and group processes that produce results in ways that build positive, productive relationships over the long term. Those kinds of relationships represent social capital, which is just as important as money in the bank. Tools include

7. **Building Social Capital through Effective Communication.** If you can't communicate successfully with others, then you won't be able to work with them successfully. This tool provides a model for improving communication and a checklist to help you implement that model.

8. **Managing Interpersonal Conflict.** Community leaders must assess conflict and manage it in ways that do not deplete relationships. This tool will help you better understand and control your responses to conflict.

9. **Building Social Capital Across Cultures.** In multicultural environments, building social capital can be particularly challenging. Here you'll find practical techniques for situations where cultural differences make trust, reciprocity, and durability more difficult to establish.

10. **Mapping Your Social Capital.** This tool will help you assess your community relationships and networks, along with the resources that they make available to maintain community health.

PART FOUR: Tools for Mobilizing Resources

In Part Four, you'll discover ways to gather community resources—ideas, people, money—and move them into action to achieve a specific outcome. The tools in this section allow you to identify key stakeholders, discover potential partners, and align diverse groups around a common purpose. These include

11. **Analyzing Stakeholders.** Use this tool to create a map of the stakeholders in your project and determine their attitudes and degree of power.

12. **Building Coalitions.** Effective collaboration does not happen by accident. This tool presents ways to organize diverse groups around mutual self-interest in a community project.

13. **Building Effective Community Teams.** Use the model explained in this tool to build effective action teams and continually improve their performance.

14. **Recruiting and Sustaining Volunteers.** Volunteers are a precious community resource. An effective community leader approaches them as such. This tool provides techniques for attracting the right volunteers to the right roles and helping them to succeed.

Appendixes

Look in the back of this book for ideas that expand on the core competencies and tools presented in Parts One through Four:

- **Appendix 1: Getting the Most from Your Meetings—A Primer for Facilitating Community Groups.** Most of the tools presented in *The Community Leadership Handbook* are designed for people to use in groups. This calls for meetings. One way to immediately increase the value of any tool is to make your meetings more effective. See this appendix for tips.

- **Appendix 2: Additional Resources.** Volumes could be written on each one of the topics included in this book. We do not claim that *The Community Leadership Handbook* is complete or exhaustive on any of those topics. Included here are references to other resources where you can probe deeper and learn more.

Worksheets

Included throughout this book are worksheets that guide you through the action steps presented in each tool. You can duplicate and distribute them to members of your community.

The worksheets in this book are also available in electronic form exclusively at the publisher's web site. Buyers of this book may download them at no cost. To access these tools, go to the following URL and use the code below to download the material.

http://www.FieldstoneAlliance.org/worksheets

Code: W547cLH06 (this code is case sensitive)

These electronic materials are intended for use in the same way as photocopies, but they are in a form that allows you to type in responses and reformat the material. Please do not download the material unless you or your organization has purchased the book. When using the worksheet in electronic or photocopied form, cite the source of the publication.

Who Can Benefit from Using This Book

This book is for anyone who wants to be effective at developing and sustaining the health of a community. We start by assuming that you are

- Wanting to be involved in community life
- Open-minded
- Willing to take risks
- Interested in creating and sustaining social change
- Willing to work collaboratively
- Willing to work at mobilizing people in your community

We also assume that you

- Will most likely use this book in your capacity as a community volunteer
- Are employed full- or part-time in, or are retired from, another field
- Have a high school education
- Are action-oriented
- Are pressed for time

We do *not* assume that you are a member of any particular profession, that you have a college degree, or even that you have a background in community organizing. You might be planning your twentieth community project—or contemplating your very first one.

Alumni of BCLP include educators, businesspeople, elected officials, health-care professionals, and members of the clergy. As a user of this book, however, you might well be a teacher, homemaker, truck driver, factory worker, computer programmer, farmer, or student. You might want to address issues created by cultural diversity or create opportunities for economic development. You might want to reduce violence in your

neighborhood, revitalize a small town business district, create affordable housing, or meet the needs of seniors in your community.

If you are interested in any issue that calls for a community-wide response—one that excites your passion and commitment—then this book is for you.

How to Use This Book

Browse this book and you might feel overwhelmed by the amount of material it contains. You might wonder how you will ever make time to read all this.

Relax. Though we've packed *The Community Leadership Handbook* with content, you do not have to read it all. In fact, much of this book is designed to be used primarily as a reference work, like an encyclopedia. You do not have to read it from cover to cover. Instead, turn to it for the specific ideas and information you want, *when* you want them, by using the following suggestions.

Preview this book

To find content that's relevant to your current needs, first get a sense of the whole. Do a book "reconnaissance"—that is, a preliminary inspection. Preview this book by flipping through the pages, spending a few seconds on each one. Skim the text, looking for boldface headings and anything else that catches your eye. You can pick up many key points simply by doing this.

Pay special attention to the This Tool at a Glance sidebars located at the beginning of each tool. They offer a summary of each tool and some suggestions about when and how to use it.

Read Part One in detail

Part One explains the core competencies in detail and provides the groundwork for all the content that follows. Many of the key messages in this book are found here. Remember that each tool in this book is simply one way for you to practice a core competency described in Part One.

Approach this book as a toolkit

Parts Two, Three, and Four of this book are like a set of bins or compartments in a huge toolkit. In each of these "bins" you will find related tools. Because they're structured this way, you don't have to read the tools completely and in order.

Instead, set priorities. Ask yourself: What tool would make the greatest positive difference in my role as a community leader right now? Answer this question by choosing one to three tools. Then learn about those in detail.

Master carpenters don't use all their tools at once. Instead, they just reach for the one that serves them best at the moment. In the same way, just focus on the community leadership tool that best suits your current project.

If you're just beginning that project, for example, then pay special attention to the planning tools described in Part Two. If your project is already well planned, then turn to parts Three and Four for ways to gain community support and mobilize action.

Note: Because this book is structured as a toolkit, the authors do not assume that you will read all of it. Therefore, you may find that certain key concepts appear in several places. For example, the distinction between *product* and *process* is explained in the introduction to Part One (see page 1) and mentioned again in several of the tools presented in Part Two. This repetition is deliberate. It's done to make sure that you'll get the core content you need even if you only read a small section of the book.

Read the whole book

This suggestion might appear to contradict the previous one. In fact, reading the whole book is just another option for obtaining the most value from it. It's true that you don't *have* to read this entire book. However, you certainly *may* if you want to.

You may find that reading through all the tools in sequence deepens your understanding of each one and reveals connections between ideas. A complete reading might also help you diagnose why certain community projects are currently struggling or why past community efforts failed.

The tools in this book offer many opportunities to assess your own leadership, as well as the effectiveness of your community's group efforts. Use this book to answer questions such as, How well have you taken into account the three core competencies in your efforts? and Which competencies need more attention?

Put ideas into action

Some books are just meant to be read. This book is meant to be *used.* That means reading the book·and then taking ideas off the page and into the world. As you read, constantly ask yourself, How can I apply this to my community project right now? The suggestions that you put into action will truly become your own.

You'll find many worksheets in this book, and each one offers an opportunity for you to move from theory to practice. Use them as checklists for planning new projects. The worksheets will take you through steps to define problems, create solutions, gain community "buy-in" for your projects, strengthen working relationships, and move people to action. Many of the worksheets also suggest ways to evaluate your projects, including questions that you can ask to get feedback on your results. Blank copies of all the worksheets are available from the publisher's web site at

www.FieldstoneAlliance.org/worksheets (use code W547cLH06)

Refer to this book often

The Community Leadership Handbook is not like a novel, a book that you might read through once, put on the shelf, and then forget. Instead, plan to return to this book often. Reread the parts that interest you. Highlight key passages and make notes in the margins about ideas that worked particularly well and points that raise questions. Make this book your own—a chronicle of your community achievements and a plan for acquiring new leadership skills.

Begin from where you stand today

As you explore the ideas in this book, remember that community leaders do not have to start their work with a mastery of all the tools described in the following pages. Instead, good community leaders are those who bring some key skills to a community project, understand their personal limitations, and collaborate with other people who have complementary skills. Start working with the skills you already possess, and then be willing to acquire new ones. There is no end to this process of learning—all it takes is a willingness to begin.

This book may not save you time or energy as a community leader. However, it can help you fulfill your leadership job description. Each tool you use promotes a better return on all the effort and time you're about to invest in creating your community's future.

Facilitating Groups: One Tool That Enhances All the Others

Community projects get planned and implemented by people who meet to combine their efforts. For this reason, your success as a community leader can hinge on your effectiveness in facilitating groups.

Perhaps you already have extensive experience in group projects and feel confident in your facilitation skills. But if you're new to working in groups or want to review this topic, then turn to Appendix 1: Getting the Most from Your Meetings—A Primer for Facilitating Community Groups, on page 185.

There you'll find ways to prepare for meetings, conduct them, and follow up on the decisions that meetings produce. These skills are not specific to framing ideas, building social capital, or mobilizing resources. Yet they will help you create more value from every tool presented in this book.