



12-2007

Knight Creative Communities Initiative (KCCI) Evaluation: Interim Report

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Stern, Mark J. and Seifert, Susan C., "Knight Creative Communities Initiative (KCCI) Evaluation: Interim Report" (2007). *Knight Creative Communities Initiative Evaluation—2007-2008*. 2.
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Abstract

During the summer of 2007, SIAP was asked by the Knight Foundation to undertake a process evaluation of its Creative Communities Initiative (KCCI) underway in Charlotte, North Carolina; Duluth, Minnesota/ Superior, Wisconsin; and Tallahassee, Florida. This memo reports on initial findings of the experience of KCCI participants from catalyst selection in March through October 2007. The memo begins with an overview of the logic of KCCI and then examines participants' experience of the initiative using a chronological structure: the selection of catalysts, the initial two-day seminar, the organization of the action or initiative teams, and the history of the teams to this point. The memo closes with general observations about participants' perceptions of the initiative.

Disciplines

Arts and Humanities | Civic and Community Engagement | Public Affairs, Public Policy and Public Administration | Urban Studies and Planning

Comments

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Evaluation: Interim Report
December 2007

Prepared for the John S. and James L. Knight Foundation by
Mark J. Stern and Susan C. Seifert

Knight Creative Communities Initiative
KCCI Evaluation: Interim Report #1—Seminars and Initiatives
December 2007

During the summer of 2007, we were asked by the Knight Foundation to undertake a process evaluation of its Creative Communities Initiative (KCCI). This memo reports on our initial findings of the experience of KCCI participants from the selection of catalysts during the late winter of 2007 through October 2007.

The report begins with an overview of the logic of KCCI. We then examine participants' experience of the initiative using a chronological structure: the selection of catalysts, the initial two-day seminar, the organization of the action or initiative teams, and the history of the teams to this point. The memo concludes with some general observations about participants' perceptions of the initiative.

1. The logic of KCCI

KCCI was undertaken as part of the John S. and James L. Knight Foundation's recent focus on the development of social entrepreneurs to promote community transformation. As Alberto Ibarguen, president of the Foundation, observed:

Social entrepreneurship—the application of entrepreneurial business thinking to social issues—is an increasingly popular concept around the world. But it isn't a fad. It is a simple and logical way to set visionary goals, plan for sustainability, and demand performance and accountability in social enterprises. We see it as part of our larger effort to identify transformational leadership and opportunities.

To that end, we sponsored urbanist Richard Florida to work in Charlotte N.C.; Duluth, Minn./Superior, Wis.; and Tallahassee, Fla., with groups of "community catalysts" tasked with identifying and building "the creative class."

As President Ibarguen notes, KCCI grows out of the academic work of Richard Florida on the role of the "creative class" in stimulating economic development. In several books and numerous speaking engagements since 2001, Professor Florida has promoted his theory that the key to a metropolitan area's economic vitality is less a function of attracting businesses than its ability to attract and retain creative people.

Florida argues that three features are critical to attracting the "creative class": talent, technology, and tolerance—the "3 T's." In the lead up to KCCI, Florida and his associates added a "fourth T"—the unique territorial assets of a particular community.

To translate his theories into empirical work, Florida and his associates developed a variety of novel indicators, including melting pot, coolness, gay, and creativity indexes. Much of this work was used to demonstrate that creativity is distinct from more common measures of contemporary economic dynamism, like the overall level of education and skill (human capital).

One feature of Florida's academic work is notable for the design of KCCI. The creative centers identified by Florida were not the product of intentional action; they generally arose "naturally," often through the unanticipated interaction of academic centers, start-up businesses, and the historical character of a place. Where traditional economic

development theories highlight features like tax rates and a “positive business environment,” creative class theory suggests that a more complex set of interactions is necessary to transform a place into a creative class magnet.

The model for KCCI derived from projects that Professor Florida and his associates undertook in El Paso, Texas and Tacoma, Washington in 2006. In El Paso, for example, the El Paso Electric Company and several government agencies sponsored the El Paso Region Creative Cities Leadership Project, which included the selection of “Creative Change Agents,” a two-day seminar and a number of projects (www.ci.el-paso.tx.us/mcad/ccip.asp). In Tacoma, Florida’s group had—in one newspaperman’s opinion—“one smashing success, a handful of good ideas mostly stuck in the good-idea stage and an encouraging sense that Tacoma, while headed in the right direction, has a long way to go.” (Dan Voelpel, “Seeds planted to start growing Tacoma’s creative class,” *Tacoma News Tribune*, November 18, 2007).

As these projects were unfolding, Richard Florida Creativity Group—a for-profit consulting firm—received a grant from the Foundation to analyze data on the Knight communities and to hold a seminar in September 2006 for the Foundation’s program officers in Detroit. The same month, the Foundation’s Board approved a second grant to Richard Florida Creativity Group (which subsequently changed its name to the Creative Class Group) for \$585,000 to implement KCCI in three communities.

As specified in the proposal, the focus of KCCI was on the “Creative Community Leadership Seminar” that would “train foundation staff and selected community leaders as creative community leaders.” At the end of the seminar, “the participants will have formed teams and laid the groundwork for year-long strategic community transformation initiatives.” The proposal noted that in the nine months following the seminar, “each community will complete three one-hour live online sessions with Florida and the RFCG Team.”

Conventionally, logic models identify three types of results of a particular project:

- *outputs* that consist of “the direct products of program activities”;
- *outcomes* that consist of specific changes in participants’ behavior, knowledge, and skills over the period following a project; and
- *impacts* that consist of fundamental and long-lasting systemic change. (WWK 2004).

From the outset, KCCI had clear *outputs* and intended *impacts*. The outputs would be the specific projects developed and implemented by the catalysts. The intended impacts consist of a transformation in the community’s four T’s so that it would become a creative class magnet. Ultimately, according to creative class theory, transforming the four T’s would have an even broader impact by driving economic development and prosperity.

The weakness in KCCI’s logic is connected primarily to *outcomes*, that is, short- and long-term changes in the three KCCI communities that would set the stage of the impacts discussed above. Based on a review of documents and discussions with CCG staff, we have identified several possible outcomes.

The most direct path would be if the projects undertaken by the catalysts were of such a magnitude that on their own they stimulate systemic change. For example, the

Greenovation team in Tallahassee believes that its work could lead to a transformation in the environmental consciousness of local residents that would impact their behavior over the long-term. CCG expressed the hope that many of the projects would influence the civic dialogue on challenges facing the communities and, thereby, have a catalytic impact on public consciousness.

Yet, this type of project would be exceptional, especially given the short time-frame of KCCI. Even a greening project would require significant preparation before and after the initiative to have such a direct impact.

Indeed, the experience of an effort in Tacoma illustrates this difficulty. Project EDEN sought to revive a declining business district in the city. Yet, “when such ventures depend on so many variables—selling a common vision, finding willing developers, securing affordable space, inspiring passionate entrepreneurs”—success may exceed the capacity or time-commitment of the catalysts.

A second alternative—and one endorsed by CCG staff—is that the projects would generate broader social networks of creative class members who understood the nature of their challenge and were committed to changing the civic dialogue. This appears to be a plausible link between outputs and impacts, but one that, on the face of it, would require a variety of supports to carry through to a successful conclusion. Indeed, the online sessions (now called “check ins”) in KCCI’s design hardly seem sufficient to sustain these projects and the overall initiative over the long term.

The social network outcome is tied to the idea of leadership. It is important not only to develop networks but also to train leaders who can use those networks to accomplish particular outcomes. This possible outcome might draw inspiration from the significant literature on community capacity-building that argues for coordinated efforts at building social capital (networks) and leadership training.

Indeed, the lack of a clear set of anticipated outcomes was linked to another challenge of KCCI’s design: the articulation of a “theory of change.” Creative class theory is focused primarily on how a set of assets, when they are in place, stimulate economic development. There is very little in Florida’s work to aid conscious efforts to engage residents and sustain their efforts over the long-term. As we shall see, in practice, KCCI communities have turned to models of community change that were already present in the three cities rather than rely on creative class theory.

One challenge for CCG staff relates to the nature of community change efforts. Much of Florida’s consulting before KCCI involved working with businesses and organizations. While the issue of “buy in” is not foreign to organizational environments, once an organization’s leadership has committed to a particular strategy, it can create the incentives and motivation to assure that other employees will engage in the process. In contrast, the “levers” for stimulating and sustaining community engagement are considerably more complex. CCG’s model assumes that—with relatively little support—the volunteer community catalysts already possess the leadership skills necessary to engage the wider community and sustain that commitment over the long term.

KCCI is built on a much-heralded and innovative theory of economic development. However, it lacks a clear set of connections between its specific projects and the broader changes it seeks to achieve. In addition, the initiative has not articulated its rationale

about how change would occur. In other words, KCCI knows what its destination is but does not have a roadmap for getting there.

2. Data and methods

The data for this assessment derive from three sources: an analysis of census data for the three KCCI communities; a survey of community catalysts; and phone and in-person interviews with a number of KCCI participants, including Knight program directors, local organizers, CCG staff, and community catalysts.

Census data

In order to compare our information on community catalysts to the “pool” from which they were drawn, we created a data file of adults in the three metropolitan areas. These data derived from the 2000 decennial census and the 2005 and 2006 American Community Survey—an annual one-percent sample of the American population. The file included data on one hundred, thirty-two thousand individuals. In order to increase the reliability of the estimates, data from 2005 and 2006 were pooled.

Catalyst Survey

During September and October 2007, the research team conducted an online survey of the community catalysts. Questions related to their motivation for becoming catalysts, preparation for the seminar, and their assessment of the seminar and their subsequent work as members of an action team. The survey was pre-tested with several catalysts and the Knight program directors and distributed on Survey Monkey.

Sixty-two catalysts began the survey, of which 52 completed all sections. Of these 52, 19 (37 percent) were from Duluth/Superior, 17 (33 percent) were from Tallahassee, and 16 (31 percent) were from Charlotte.

Most of the questions on the survey were open-ended. The research team coded these answers into standard categories. For a number of questions relating to the catalysts’ assessment of aspects of the initiative, a three-level coding scheme (positive, mixed, negative) was used. Results were downloaded into a statistical package for analysis.

Site visits

During September and October 2007, a member of the evaluation team made a site visit to each of the KCCI communities. In consultation with the Knight program directors, we set up interviews with a number of catalysts and local organizers. In addition to individual interviews, in two of the cities, we were able to attend meetings of action teams and one all-catalyst meeting.

The interviews were structured around three topics: their assessment of the progress of KCCI in their community, elements of the initiative that had either supported and undermined their efforts as catalysts, and ideas about how one might judge the overall success of KCCI. Information from these final two topics will be included in a subsequent report.

3. KCCI implementation

This section assesses the initial stages of KCCI's implementation during 2007. The KCCI process consists of 4 stages:

- recruitment and selection of community catalysts
- catalysts' preparation
- two-day seminar and
- action team projects.

Recruitment and selection of community catalysts

The key to the success of KCCI is the selection of a group of approximately 30 community members to serve as volunteer community catalysts. The catalysts are to be trained by CCG in the theories and evidence of Florida's approach. By the end of the two-day seminar, they are formed into "action teams" which are tasked with completing a set of projects during the next year (between May 2007 and March 2008). In other words, this group of volunteers is responsible for virtually the entire project with relatively little financial or technical support.

Catalysts learned about KCCI from a variety of sources. Nearly half of the catalysts for whom we have data learned through the newspaper or Internet. Another third learned either from Knight program directors or other organizational contacts. The remainder learned through personal contacts.

Not surprisingly, catalysts who learned about KCCI through the newspaper or the web knew fewer catalysts before the initiative than those who learned through a contact. The differences, however, were smaller than expected. If you learned through the newspaper or web, you knew, on average, three or four other catalysts before KCCI. If you learned through an organizational contact, you knew 7 catalysts before KCCI. Thus, the catalyst networks appeared to build on existing social networks in the three communities.

This observation was confirmed through interviews. Each city has had a variety of civic engagement initiatives over the past several years. It appears that many catalysts were "joiners" who had been involved in previous efforts. This reality has two implications for KCCI. First, although KCCI's purpose was to mobilize creative people who had not previously been engaged in civic improvement efforts, it was essentially attracting many of the people who were already engaged in these activities. Second, many catalysts complained that CCG did not acknowledge that it was building on a number of existing assets, including these earlier efforts and the experience of the catalysts.

A *host committee* made up of significant members of each community reviewed the applications and selected the catalysts. One point that was emphasized by members of the CCG staff, program directors, and others involved in the process was an interest in selecting catalysts who were ethnically diverse and who represented younger members of the creative class who might not already be involved in civic affairs. Our only consistent measure of ethnicity comes from the respondents to the catalyst survey. Of the 45 catalysts who responded to the ethnicity question, 87 percent were white and 7 percent were black. The 12 percent of Duluth/Superior respondents who were not white actually was higher than the nonwhite representation among professionals and

managers in the Twin Ports in the 2005 and 2006 American Community Survey (4 percent). However, the nonwhite catalyst figures for Charlotte (17 percent) and Tallahassee (12 percent) were lower than the nonwhite representation of professionals and managers in those metropolitan areas in 2005 and 2006. The representation of African Americans, in particular, was much lower among survey respondents than in the overall professional and managerial population.

It may be that respondents to the survey were more likely to be white than the catalysts generally. If this were the case, the organizers may have had greater success than the survey results suggest. Yet, it seems likely that survey respondents are more engaged in KCCI than non-respondents. This suggests that non-white catalysts have become less engaged in KCCI after their selection.

The age profile of catalysts (as reflected by the 63 percent of catalysts for whom we had age information) was heavily weighted by 35-to-54 year-olds. A number of the younger catalysts commented that younger adults were less likely to be included, a point supported by the evidence. Duluth/Superior was the only community in which catalysts between 25 and 34 were over-represented compared to the age structure of all professionals and managers in the metropolitan area.

KCCI's goal of selecting a pool of younger, ethnically diverse, and civically unconnected catalysts was only partially achieved. Non-response bias may explain part of this finding; although if young, nonwhite catalysts were less likely to respond to the survey, that may itself be notable. It may also be a product of the relatively short period of time the communities had to complete the selection process. A number of people involved in the process opined that they had done a good job of creating an applicant pool, but they generally acknowledged that time was a significant constraint.

Catalysts' preparation

Catalysts were expected to undertake two types of preparation for the seminar. They received an information packet of materials on creative class theory written by Richard Florida. They were also expected to host a "working social" with a number of community members in which they discussed Florida's theories and how they might apply to their community. In addition, there was an initial meeting of the catalysts to outline the plan for KCCI.

It appears that participants generally found this process satisfying. Most catalysts did some reading (although many acknowledged that they did not get through much of it) and developed a method of discussing the initiative with a group of friends.

Several catalysts expressed concern that the information gathered through these "working socials" was not integrated into the two-day seminar. Several catalysts felt that these socials had been a very valuable exercise, but that the two-day seminar did not allow for a two-way exchange between CCG staff and the local participants.

Two-day seminar

The major role of CCG in KCCI was conducting a two-day seminar attended by community catalysts and the local coordinators of the initiative. Although catalysts and local organizers had a variety of reactions to the seminar, the balance of opinion was decidedly negative.

The overall structure of the seminar consisted of a keynote address by Florida, followed by the presentation of data on the individual communities (compared to other communities on which CCG had developed data). Later during the first day, CCG facilitated a number of breakout sessions during which the four T's were discussed in light of the data. A large part of the seminars was devoted to discussing and selecting projects on which the catalysts would work and the division of catalysts among the projects. The seminar culminated with the presentation of the projects to an audience.

Seminar preparation

As they had done in El Paso and Tacoma, Florida and his associates gave local organizers an extensive list of requirements for the two-day seminar, including the exact days of the seminar, the local arrangements for CCG staff, and the setting and catering requirements. As with the recruitment and selection process, local organizers felt great time pressure in preparing for the seminar and believe that insufficient time was allocated.

The funding of the two-day seminar was unusual. Although CCG received funding from the Foundation for KCCI, CCG staff informed local organizers that they would be responsible for all costs associated with the seminar. Apparently, only one of the three Knight program directors was aware of this fact before planning was well underway.

Friction from the planning of the seminar continues to influence the trajectory of KCCI. Local organizers pointed to two sources of conflict. First, although local organizers were required to fund all costs associated with the seminar, they were not consulted on the arrangements or the budget for those costs. While many of the arrangements for CCG staff were not outlandish by corporate standards, they exceeded those common in the nonprofit community. For example, CCG billed local organizers for private limousines in both the KCCI communities and the departure cities. On another occasion, a local organizer was required to send a check to a travel agent for air travel before the seminar rather than receiving an expense report afterwards.

The timeliness and quality of seminar materials also contributed to friction between local organizers and CCG. In one community, the original seminar materials arrived only days before the seminar. In the opinion of the organizers, the materials included errors that needed to be corrected before they could be duplicated. Because of the time squeeze, local organizers were required to use a higher-cost duplication service that significantly added to the overall cost of the seminar.

Local organizers in two of the three KCCI communities came away from the experience with two strong impressions of CCG. First, they perceived CCG staff as "arrogant." The seminar was not a collaborative enterprise; local organizers saw themselves as simply following the orders and paying the bills of CCG. Second, for a number of local organizers, the preparation experience raised questions about the competence of CCG staff. One organizer asked why CCG couldn't pay its travel agent; another asked why materials were late and poorly prepared.

Florida's presentation

The seminar opened with a presentation of creative class theory that CCG staff described as a shortened version of Florida's typical speech. This was the extent of his involvement in the seminar, although he typically was present for at least half of the first day. Florida's involvement generated extremely negative responses on the part of the

catalysts. Only 19 percent of respondents to the catalyst survey rated his involvement positively, while 64 percent saw it in a negative light. Most of the positive comments focused on the quality and vitality of the presentation. As one catalyst noted:

Richard was charismatic and inspiring. He got in and got out—but that is expected. He gave time to individuals if they wanted to chat. I thought he did a very good job and was personable and accessible.

Negative comments did not challenge this perception so much as question Florida's actual involvement with KCCI and how individualized his presentation was to the communities.

He did not have a role aside from a cameo appearance. His theory is what we are testing and hoping to achieve with our efforts. I didn't expect him to be there the entire time, but I didn't expect to get handed off entirely either.

A canned speech ... I expected much more direct interaction and guidance from him.

Richard flew in for a few hours and flew out so his role in the seminar was minor.

He did a "drive-by" appearance that seemed to be about 45 minutes in length and then was gone to pursue other things.

Presentation and discussion of data

The detailed presentation of the four T's and the discussion of community data were the parts of the seminar that participants found most satisfying. Nearly half of the catalysts were positive about the discussion of the four T's, while only 11 percent expressed negative opinions of this. Among the positive comments were:

I thought the discussion about what the 4 T's were was good. I think the link to economic development could have been highlighted more. I think more concrete examples of the importance of the four T's might have been helpful. I think this is clear in Richard Florida's writings though.

The T's seemed to be explained well. Overall, I thought that the seminar did not afford enough time for the catalysts to interact and discuss with the community. We were pushed (and are still pushed) to create initiatives without thorough discussion of the challenges faced in our community.

Yes, the data helped me understanding more of what the theory of creative class is all about. I think many of us came to the seminar with our own agendas and the possibilities for moving those agendas forward became more evident as we began to break down any barriers that might have existed prior to coming together.

Roughly forty percent of catalysts had a mixed response to these elements of the seminar. Typically, they saw the value of the concepts, but felt that the presentation and discussion could have been more organized or more skillfully pursued.

I think in most cases the four T's were adequately explained. Some of the background research done on our market was questionable, and in some cases false. There was some disappointment among the catalysts that some of this

research appeared on the shoddy side. I think more time could be spent explaining how these four areas correspond to a region and what areas need to be "propped up" by the catalysts would be helpful.

Somewhat, I think further research by the facilitators of our area to draw out examples would have been helpful. They were explained as they were in the text and that was it. They are self explanatory to a degree but relevance of them is key, which was not provided. More experience, accurate data of our area and a greater understanding of it as opposed to a drive around upon arrival.

I think they were adequately explained. How to incorporate them better into the community may not have been explained as well. I realize that it is a case of tolerance breeds tolerance, technology begets technology, but how to better foster these traits wasn't explained very well.

One issue that generated a concern among many participants was the accuracy and timeliness of the data analysis produced by CCG. Roughly a third of respondents to the catalyst survey had a positive response to the data, a third had a negative response, and a third had a mixed response. These proportions varied by city; half of the Tallahassee catalysts had a positive assessment of the data, compared to only 24 percent of Duluth/Superior and 20 percent of Charlotte catalysts.

Catalysts expressed concerns that they did not receive the data ahead of time and therefore could not study them. Others asked why the data were not documented or the categories explained. Others were quite upset about the comparison communities that CCG used. Finally, some catalysts wondered how recent or accurate the data were.

No, there was not much time and I did not feel that it was in much depth. I thought that had we seen this before we might have been able to add more to it and make it more detailed. I think this was a missed opportunity to involve local people in prep of this data and/or share more info early so we could be more prepared. There was not much time dedicated to this.

The data was outdated. Particularly, I noticed some of the employment numbers were clearly wrong, as we've experienced growth in some areas and decline in others which wasn't represented.

Apparently the data from our community was a small sample which brought into question its accuracy. A question which several of us raised was what came first—the 4 T's, or the great city. Another question was whether the data used to measure tolerance was appropriate. This question was brushed aside with the statement that it was the best measure available.

Yes, there were questions about the data, and there was a bit of a defensive attitude taken by the researcher when his numbers were questioned. This is natural when you are "called on the carpet" about work that you have done. However, it did cause some catalysts to question all of the research and numbers that were presented at the seminar. It made for a rocky start to our relationship with the Creative Class Group in some regards.

First, there was NOT a significant part of the seminar devoted to the presentation of the data. This was a glaring weakness of the seminar. We had all of this information in our folder that was not covered or explained. I had looked

at the data in advance but did not get the explanations and interpretations that I expected. Yes, I question the sources and accuracy of the data. As someone who does comparable work professionally, it was not an analysis that I would be willing to trot out in a public setting. I hate to say this, but the presenting group were "not ready for prime time" for an effort such as this one. They did not inspire confidence. They were clearly at one remove. And so on.

More than any particular deficiency in the data, their presentation during the seminar raised concerns among participants about the skill and competence of CCG staff. Many catalysts felt that CCG staff was unprepared to have a dialogue with them. The "defensiveness" noted by many raised concerns that, as one catalyst put it, the staff was not "ready for prime time."

Project selection

A significant part of the two-day seminars was devoted to identifying and selecting projects. The process consisted of a period of brainstorming ideas for projects followed by several rounds of "passion voting" in which catalysts had a number of votes that they could either spread over a variety of projects or concentrate on one particular project.

Overall, the catalysts expressed very negative views of the project selection process. As with other parts of the initiative, there seemed to be an emphasis on speed for speed's sake, which left many catalysts feeling coerced. As one catalyst noted, "I thought this process was awful. It seemed almost random and not thought through enough for such important decisions that would drive the time spent for a full year by 31 people. People expressed concerns with this process during the process, but it seemed like these concerns were ignored."

Overall, only 19 percent of respondents to the catalyst survey viewed the project selection process in a positive light, while 64 percent viewed it negatively. The most common negative comments noted that the process was too rushed and would have benefited from a period of reflection before projects were selected.

Another aspect of the project selection process that concerned many catalysts was the requirement that each project fit into one of the four T's. As another catalyst put it: "One better idea would have been to identify 3 to 4 projects that crosscut all 4 T's, rather than projects for each T." Others expressed concern that the "T" that needed the most work—often identified as "tolerance"—was neglected by the selection process.

Several catalysts expressed concern about the skill of the facilitators:

I am very familiar with decision making processes like the one used that are meant to be evidence-based and participatory. The facilitators were not particularly good at their jobs. There was not enough time allowed for the process to function properly. There was little effort to tie the various projects into an integrated whole. There was too much confusion. Steps were not fully or adequately explained and instructions were difficult to understand and follow.

I was frankly very disappointed in how the projects were selected. We were assured the process was well thought out and effective, but I had no confidence in it. Felt more like a frenzy and desire to stay on schedule than take to the time to develop the ideas sufficiently.

I think the consensus was that there was quite a push by the Creative Class Group to have the projects "cut and dried" by the end of the two-day seminar. In my mind, this was not possible and could actually have led to inferior projects.

I think the process was a canned approach to achieve their outcome for the day. The selection was forced, and poorly forced at that. The Florida team demonstrated no skills in facilitation and group process.

A final problem had to do with the number of projects. While ideally only three or four projects would have been chosen, in one community seven projects were launched. The proliferation of projects reduced the number of catalysts in each project group and subsequently created both resource and motivational issues for several of the action teams.

Were the catalysts prepared to undertake the initiative?

In September 2007, approximately five months after the two-day seminars, we asked the catalysts if the two-day seminar prepared them to undertake the individual projects. Only 9 percent of the catalysts who responded to the survey responded that they were prepared; 69 percent answered the question negatively.

One of the significant explanations of the lack of preparation was related to the gap between creative class theory's broad vision and a concrete theory of change that could guide the groups in their work:

While the seminar prepared us to comment on the overall strategy and thought behind KCCI, when speaking to people regarding the initiatives, I do not think that it was particularly useful for the hands-on implementation of the specific projects. I would add a component whereby catalysts in other communities who are currently implementing, or have already implemented, projects speak to the group to give them an accurate idea of the amount of time and commitment that is truly necessary to create an initiative and make it successful.

All we were able to do was identify initiatives but the next steps were and, to some extent remain, elusive. I would add more time to clearly presenting the data and tying it to the theory. I would spread out the decision-making process. I would recommend taking three days to get where you want to go—and include making it very clear what the next steps are.

No. I feel they should have a 'cookbook' with techniques for addressing commonly held issues with execution of projects (e.g., fundraising, building a team, etc.)

Another set of concerns related to the logistics of the seminar. In this view, there simply was not enough time to decide rationally on projects and divide into groups. Suddenly, at the end of the second day, several catalysts felt that they had been thrust into a group whose interests they might not fully share. A number of catalysts believed that a better process would have been to reconvene the catalysts several weeks later to make final decisions about projects and team membership:

Not really. A big push was to get people involved right away—even before we really knew what we were doing. This seems to be a recipe for failure.

No, there was insufficient time to create sound foundations for the initiatives. If I were to re-design the process, I would have the first two days built around learning about and discussion of the community. I would then bring folks back to create the initiatives. The initiatives could be built around the knowledge gained in the first 2 days and subsequent research in the community.

After the voting—there was little strategy time. If you could have a "do over" try this—have the seminar and a follow-up meeting two weeks later to do the strategy planning and reevaluate if—after some time away from the crowd—they really believe this is worthy of a year's commitment.

The two-day seminar was a central element of KCCI. It was the only opportunity for the CCG team to visit the KCCI communities and develop a relationship with the catalysts. CCG had conceptualized the seminars as critical to developing the catalysts' skill and knowledge around creative class theory. Finally, the seminars were intended to motivate the catalysts and send them into the planning phase of their initiatives with energy and a sense of purpose.

From the standpoint of participants, the seminars were only partially successful in achieving these goals. While the catalysts were generally impressed with the staff's knowledge of creative class theory and their use of data, they were concerned about Florida's engagement in KCCI, the process for selecting projects, and their overall preparation to move to the next stage.

During our site visits to the three KCCI communities, catalysts confided that they left the seminar with a determination to see the projects through, even though they felt that CCG had not held up its end of the bargain in preparing them for this task. This was hardly the best frame of mind for a group of volunteers about to undertake a set of difficult projects.

Action team experience

This report is primarily concerned with the launching of the KCCI action projects. A fuller assessment of the process will await a subsequent report in 2008. However, based on the survey and interviews, we are able to make a set of preliminary conclusions about the initial experience of the action teams.

Sustained commitment

Analyzing the surveys and speaking with catalysts individually, the evaluation team was impressed with the continuing level of energy and enthusiasm among the catalysts. While many of the projects have run into problems as they have developed, very few of the projects have ceased to function. Most importantly, the catalysts with whom we spoke expressed a deep sense of responsibility to see the projects through.

Many of the catalysts reported that attendance in their action team had declined over time. In a sense, the patterns were quite predictable. Projects that had initial success seem to have retained their catalysts and attracted new members; projects that struggled at the start often lost energy and members.

Overall, there were sizable differences in the level of catalysts' time commitment to the projects. Among the 47 respondents for whom we have data, the average figure was 16 hours a month. Yet, this number was highly skewed: half of catalysts reported they

worked 10 hours or less; twenty percent of catalysts reported working five hours or less; while another 20 percent reported working 26 hours or more per month.

This pattern does not seem particularly unexpected for a volunteer effort, but it does serve to remind us that KCCI is a volunteer effort, and for that matter, a volunteer effort with relatively little external support. In future reports, we plan to study more systematically levels of engagement.

Silo-ed

The rush to identify projects and form action teams had an unanticipated effect that came out particularly in our interviews with catalysts. Catalysts complained that they no longer felt a part of the broader initiative. This perception was less strong in Duluth/Superior, where regular all-team meetings have been part of the routine; but even there, catalysts perceived that their ownership was less with the initiative than with their particular project.

There are a variety of explanations of this feeling of isolation. The catalysts generally describe the two-day seminar as intense and hectic. They were excited about the prospects of their group, but didn't have time to form bonds with other catalysts. As we noted above, because of dissatisfaction with the method of choosing projects and forming teams, many of the catalysts saw their teams as an imperfect fit for their interests.

Yet, the perception of isolation may have had a deeper cause. As we noted earlier, while creative class theory provides a clear idea about goals for KCCI, it provides little in the way of guidance about how to pursue those goals. Many of the catalysts expressed disappointment that this gap wasn't addressed during the two-day seminar, which explains the high proportion of catalysts who believed they weren't ready to pursue their projects.

Whatever its cause, the perception of isolation and lack of support is common among catalysts. The evaluation team shared its sense of this issue with program directors in Tallahassee and Charlotte, who hope to make "mid-course corrections" to address it.

Theories of change

KCCI did not provide the catalysts with a theory of change that they could use to guide their work. In the absence of a single theory, the different KCCI communities have developed their own sense of how to pursue their work. We plan to have more systematic evidence on this in a future report. As an opening observation, however, we noted that the different communities tended to appropriate previous civic engagement efforts to find ways of making sense of their work.

In Duluth/Superior, for example, KCCI began on the heels of an effort to build social capital in the region, an initiative sponsored by the community foundation and in which a number of community catalysts had been involved. As a result, many aspects of KCCI in Duluth connect back to the need to develop trust and engagement across the region. To take one example, the ArtWorks project is focused on building bridges between the arts community and the business community in the Twin Ports, an effort that is supported by other local philanthropies.

In Tallahassee, local organizers are more explicit about their model for change. In the late 1990s, members of the civic community had initiated a dialogue on the future of

transportation and environmental quality, called Blueprint 2000. The process culminated in the successful extension of a local sales tax to fund transportation and water quality improvements in the region. The success of Blueprint 2000 resulted from a deliberate effort to broker a working relationship between groups that had previously worked at cross-purposes. Their success in overcoming these barriers fits closely with Clarence Stone's concept of "civic capacity," which he defines as "the extent to which different sectors of the community—business, parents, educators, state and local officeholders, nonprofits, and others—act in concert around a matter of community-wide import."

In both Charlotte and Tallahassee, several catalysts pointed to other leadership training efforts in their regions as models. These efforts typically focused on building skills and connections between participants rather than producing particular outcomes. By contrast, KCCI spent little systematic effort of these aspects of civic engagement.

The diversity of change theories is not necessarily a bad thing. It underlines the fact that the catalysts were a creative and resourceful group of residents. However, it does suggest that the gaps identified in the logic model analysis deserve more attention as KCCI moves forward.

Barriers faced by action teams

Catalysts identified three sets of problems faced by the action teams between May and October: defining the scope of their projects, logistical and time pressures, and funding.

Project definition

A number of catalysts reported that they quickly ran into difficulties defining (or re-defining) the nature of their project. On the most general level, one catalyst asked "What are we?" He continued, we need to "make sure that our goals/accomplishments align with the overall idea" of KCCI. Another noted that: "We have struggled as a team to decide what we would do in the region." "The biggest obstacle is staying focused on a couple of projects," commented a third.

In a number of cases, projects simply ran into dead-ends and needed to be redefined. Here, the Knight project directors and other local organizers played an important role in working with the catalysts to get over the obstacle. The most common pattern in these cases was the scaling back of ambitions, for example, from an international film festival to one that focused on student work and emerging artists.

In other cases, the action team became inactive, although we identified only one case in which a team agreed to disband. In speaking with participants, it seems clear that having some mechanism for reassessing the projects and perhaps redefining the teams would have been helpful. It would allow the catalysts to decide if a project that was in trouble should just be abandoned and the catalysts redeployed to other projects.

Logistical and time constraints

The most frequently concern was lack of time and people to accomplish the work and to overcome barriers. As we noted above, there was great variation in the amount of time catalysts have devoted to the projects. As a result, those who are most committed were likely to feel overwhelmed. "The main difficulty," reported one catalyst, "is in carving out time to work on it."

Because this was essentially a volunteer effort, sometimes relatively small resource needs—for example, in designing a survey—proved to be a barrier. In other situations, the lack of clear organizational authority proved problematic. For example, when an action team in the Twin Ports sponsored a train/bicycle ride, the issue of liability insurance arose. Although there was general agreement that all parties would be liable in case of a problem, it remained unclear who would assume responsibility. CCG's reaction to the situation was most interesting. Its staff asserted that it had nothing to do with the action teams and requested that the Foundation sign an indemnification waiver.

One issue that arose in several of the communities had to do with the recruitment of other community members to the KCCI action teams. CCG has actively encouraged the teams to recruit new members to expand the social network committed to a creative class view of economic development.

Yet, the catalysts are not sure how to treat newer community members. In some action teams, they have been treated as "volunteers" as distinct from the catalysts. In other situations, they have been referred to as "new catalysts." This semantic disagreement is one symptom of a certain ambivalence among the catalysts about whether KCCI is their initiative or whether they should pass ownership on to a wider group. Of course, literally, a *catalyst* is something that "precipitates a process or event, especially without being involved in or changed by the consequences." Certainly, the community catalysts see themselves as neither uninvolved nor unchanged by KCCI.

Funding

In every community, catalysts raised the issue of funding for the action team. Because this was a high-profile initiative sponsored by a major national foundation and staffed by a well-known team, the catalysts assumed that there would be funding available to support the teams and to allow them to move ahead with their projects. In one community, the catalysts believed that they would have a third of the \$580,000 price tag to work with.

The funding issue caused two types of problems. Relatively trivial sums—say to get refreshments for public event—required a separate effort that could slow down the work of an action team. Most importantly, ambiguity about whether resources were available or "in the pipeline" occupied a significant share of some team meetings and added an element of uncertainty to the process.

CCG's role since the seminars

One surprise to virtually all of the participants in KCCI has been the limited role played by CCG since the seminar. The original proposal called for on-line sessions in which Florida would participate. Yet, the catalysts reported that Florida himself has had no contact with them since his appearance at the seminar.

Overall, the catalysts reported negative perceptions of the performance of CCG since the seminar. Twenty-three percent of survey respondents had a positive assessment of CCG staff's performance, while 54 percent had a negative assessment. A number of catalysts found the "check in" calls and other contacts to be very helpful: "They have always been responsive to my emails or telephone calls. The information provided has been solid." Another noted that they have "been very encouraging."

The majority of opinion has not been as positive. Several catalysts saw the check-ins as “a waste of time” or “frustrating.” “I do not think the staff members have been helpful,” reported one catalyst. “In fact, some of the reporting requirements, etc, are more make-work in nature than helpful.”

In Duluth/Superior, the communication team was concerned that CCG had asked that all press releases from the action teams be vetted by CCG. There was a consensus on the committee that this would cause logistical problems and was unjustified given the limited contribution that CCG had made to the action teams.

Another problem reported by the catalysts was CCG’s lack of “local knowledge.”

We have followed the periodic check-in schedule with the Creative Class Group. Because the group is not familiar with local resources, we have not found them to be particularly helpful.

A few conference calls. Not too helpful. Seems like we spend a ton of time telling them things about our project that they should already know, then they make rather flippant/obvious suggestions that haven't been thought through. I don't have an understanding of the value that they are supposed to be bringing ongoing—so perhaps that is an issue and maybe I have too high of an expectation.

The “local knowledge” problem was exacerbated by CCG’s general lack of familiarity with the civic scene in smaller cities. Several catalysts reported that cities the size of the KCCI communities have few potential funders of nonprofits. Especially for catalysts who worked for nonprofits, suggestions that they seek funding for the project from these funders created great difficulties.

As a result, only 8 percent of respondents said they would contact CCG when they encounter a problem or have a question. Instead, they identified the Foundation program director or another local organizer as their first point for help.

Overall assessment of KCCI implementation

The catalysts remain committed and positive about KCCI. When we asked if the initiative had met their expectations, 62 percent answered positively and only 16 percent answered negatively. One catalyst noted; “I am happy to be participating in this effort and feel that our team is making a difference in our community.” This seems to be a common perspective among the catalysts. When asked what activities were most satisfying about the experience, catalysts most frequently pointed to the full-team meetings and the meetings of the action teams. Clearly, the social interaction among the catalysts was one of the great draws.

In contrast with their positive assessment of their involvement in KCCI, the catalysts continue to view CCG’s involvement negatively. Over half (53 percent) view CCG’s overall performance negatively, and only 16 percent view it positively. The most positive assessments acknowledge that CCG’s contribution was primarily during the seminar:

The Creative Class Group was very important as we began this journey, but as we move forward with the details of making this work the Group has taken on a secondary role. This is the case simply because they are not in our local community and, therefore, unable to help with issues that arise.

A more mixed assessment made a similar point (speaking directly to CCG):

You ran a nice seminar but I haven't sensed much involvement since then. During our group update via conference call one of the facilitators was talking via cell phone as he walked to another meeting. I know you're busy people but not being able to dedicate 15 minutes to a conference call—the only structured contact to date—left me wondering how much effort our facilitators are putting into this project from their end. It feels a little like you held a seminar, helped us pick interesting but unrealistic initiatives, and then said goodbye and walked off into the sunset. Maybe you're doing more than I'm aware of, but if so, you should keep us posted on your efforts.

The negative comments were less charitable, ranging from “poor” to “useless.”

I don't feel that there has been much "facilitation" other than the initial meeting. It feels more like reporting back.

The Creative Class Group (Florida's folks) seems more interested in the gospel of Richard Florida than in what the unique issues and needs are for Charlotte.

Non-existent. If they are recruited to do this in other communities, only do it if they have added demonstrated skill in group facilitation and support or limit their role to the data delivery.

On a scale of 1 to 10 I would give them a "one."

I would give them a D-. In most ways, it is the catalysts that are making things happen.

Would not be eligible for re-hire.

4. Conclusions

KCCI will not be completed until March 2008, and the evaluation team will continue to gather evidence of the action team process as it unfolds. So, any conclusions—especially those related to the action teams—must be considered preliminary. Still, there are some clear lessons for the Foundation, local organizers, CCG, and the catalysts.

Restructure the KCCI process

Based on the three KCCI communities, there are some elements of the KCCI process that could be organized differently. Many of these derive from the catalysts' perception that haste makes waste—that emphasis on doing things quickly has undermined the best efforts of participants. In addition, there needs to be a clearer focus on team building before catalysts are pushed into the more instrumental elements of the project.

While the catalysts did their "homework" before the two-day seminar, there never was an opportunity to reflect on the reading or the "working social" before the two-day seminar. This would also have allowed the catalysts to get to know one another before the seminar.

Many of the catalysts felt that trying to accomplish too much during the two-day seminar compromised the quality of the outcomes. A number of participants suggested that allowing some time—perhaps two to three weeks—between the brainstorming about projects and the actual selection process would enhance the quality of the projects selected and the commitment of the catalysts to their team.

KCCI would be a stronger initiative, as well, if all the catalysts felt "ownership" of all the projects. First, this would prevent the "silo" mentality—reported by many catalysts—from developing. Second, it would allow the group to assess which projects deserved to continue and which might be profitably shut down. Finally, it would prevent the lack of success of one project to lead to the catalysts' dropping out of the initiative.

While some of the catalysts were unrealistic to expect that they would have significant Foundation funding available immediately, there should be a pool of funding to support meeting expenses and modest event costs. In addition, clear local leadership (not just coordination) of the initiative and technical support would reduce the likelihood that the action teams would "get stuck." These are areas where all-volunteer efforts are predictably vulnerable. A modest investment in these aspects would greatly enhance the initiative.

From the start, CCG viewed the three KCCI communities as a pilot test for the process. They have been aware of a number of the concerns raised by project participants and see them as part of the learning process associated with refining their model.

Clarify CCG's responsibilities

The most striking feature of KCCI to this point is the ambiguity about CCG's role. The original project design seemed to anticipate the active involvement of Richard Florida and his staff in the action team projects. Yet, their involvement has been limited, by and large, to a set of periodic conference calls, which many catalysts see as more of a hindrance than a help. As far as we know, Richard Florida himself has been virtually absent from KCCI since his appearances at the two-day seminars.

Frankly, it seems remarkable that the Foundation's agreement with CCG could remain this unclear. CCG wishes to take credit for the successes of KCCI and to distance itself from its shortcomings. For the evaluation team, the illogic of the situation was exemplified by CCG's assertion that it should be released from any liability for KCCI activities because it was neither convener nor participant in the action teams' work.

A major part of CCG's efforts went into developing data on the communities and comparing it with other metropolitan areas. Many catalysts raised questions about the utility of these data. Certainly, they have played a very limited role in the selection of projects and the work of the action team. While the data should play a role in the eventual evaluation of KCCI's success, their role in the catalysts' work seem relatively minor and should be reassessed.

Ultimately, Richard Florida's celebrity may limit CCG's ability to play successfully all of the roles it currently assumes. After all, the distance between being seen as a "rock star" and being judged as "arrogant" is not very great. The catalysts want someone to get into the trenches and help them accomplish their work. It's unrealistic to expect Richard Florida to do so.

Given the catalysts' judgment about the quality of CCG's efforts since the seminar, it might make sense to restrict CCG's role to the first part of the seminar (Florida's presentation and discussion of creative class theory). Then, the process could be handed over to a local facilitator who would oversee the development of projects. This would take advantage of CCG's assets and reduce those aspects that the catalysts have viewed most negatively.