

# STRENGTHENING OUT-OF-SCHOOL TIME NONPROFITS:

## The Role of Foundations in Building Organizational Capacity

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**May 2008**

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## Introduction: Learning Opportunities and Challenges in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century-- Rethinking the Role of Out-of-School Time Nonprofits

*"In the decades to come, school and after-school may become integrated into a new kind of day for children, one that is a blend of offerings in the community with more traditional programming in the school. Perhaps if someone reads this, years from now, they will wonder what the term "after-school" means, since the entire school day will be changed dramatically. In the meantime, however, the next few years hold much new promise for creating new neighborhoods for children that bring together care, education, and youth development while addressing the needs of working families."*<sup>1</sup>

Recognition of time limits and types of opportunities for learning in the current school day and year has catapulted questions of how to reframe learning opportunities to the center of the American education reform debate. Most agree that it is not enough simply to lengthen the school day and year. More of the same is not enough. Thus, intentional efforts to provide learning opportunities that are linked and aligned across the school day and year to provide a seamless array of supports are accelerating. Many believe that this holistic approach to learning is logically unavoidable if we are to address issues of educational inequity and to equip youth with necessary skills to succeed in a global economy.

Central to this new vision for learning is the role of out-of-school time (OST) nonprofits, currently responsible for operating many of the direct service after school and summer programs in the country. As the textbox to the right articulates, we believe that OST nonprofits have the potential to be powerful change agents in developing, implementing, evaluating, and advocating for a new vision for learning in this country. As a result, among many who are concerned about our nation's future, there is growing recognition of the need for OST nonprofits to look beyond their own programs, to work with each other, with schools, with health organizations, and with other community-based and public agencies to create an array of

### **A Vision for Nonprofits**

"Nonprofits operate at the intersection of society's major sectors. The best of these organizations take advantage of their unique role and their unprecedented opportunity to create greater impact. To win at the social change game, it's not about being the biggest, or the fastest, or even the best-managed nonprofit. The most powerful, influential, and strategic organizations *transform others* to become forces for good." (p.224)<sup>3</sup>

accessible, developmentally appropriate, and effective after school and summer learning choices for all children across the day and year, particularly those who are economically or otherwise disadvantaged.<sup>2</sup> Achievement of this vision would result in all children and youth getting the learning opportunities they need for success in the 21<sup>st</sup> century.

<sup>1</sup> Lombardi, J. (2003). *Time to Care: Redesigning Child Care to Promote Education, Support Families, and Build Communities*. Philadelphia: Temple University Press. p. 127.

<sup>2</sup> Time, Learning, and After School Task Force. (2007). *A New Day for Learning*. Washington DC: Collaborative Communications Group. <http://www.edutopia.org/pdfs/ANewDayforLearning.pdf>

But moving toward a vision of linked, aligned, and seamless networked learning supports and opportunities has several implications for the OST nonprofit sector. Specifically, it will require:

- stronger, more effective and more accountable nonprofit organizations that provide and support diverse, quality services.
- an OST nonprofit sector in which organizations from the community to the national level work together on behalf of sustained, accessible and effective services for all children and youth.
- that the OST nonprofit sector play a key role in defining and operationalizing what the new day and year for learning will be.
- that OST nonprofits individually, and collectively, develop a set of organizational capacities that will enable them to be adaptable, high-performing organizations poised and ready to seize the new opportunities, new ideas, and new partnerships afforded in a new vision for learning.

Addressing these implications raises an immediate and challenging question: *What supports will enable OST nonprofits to become high-impact organizations, to be a powerful collective “force for good” working together to support access to and choices of an array of integrated learning supports for all?* The purpose of this paper is to address this question, and to do so in a way that helps OST nonprofits avoid what the authors of the recent book *Forces for Good: The Six Practices of High Impact Nonprofits* call the “social entrepreneurs trap.” This is the trap of expanding one’s own program or model without leveraging expertise and other capacities to support “field building, policy making and broader social change” in the community and country.<sup>3</sup>

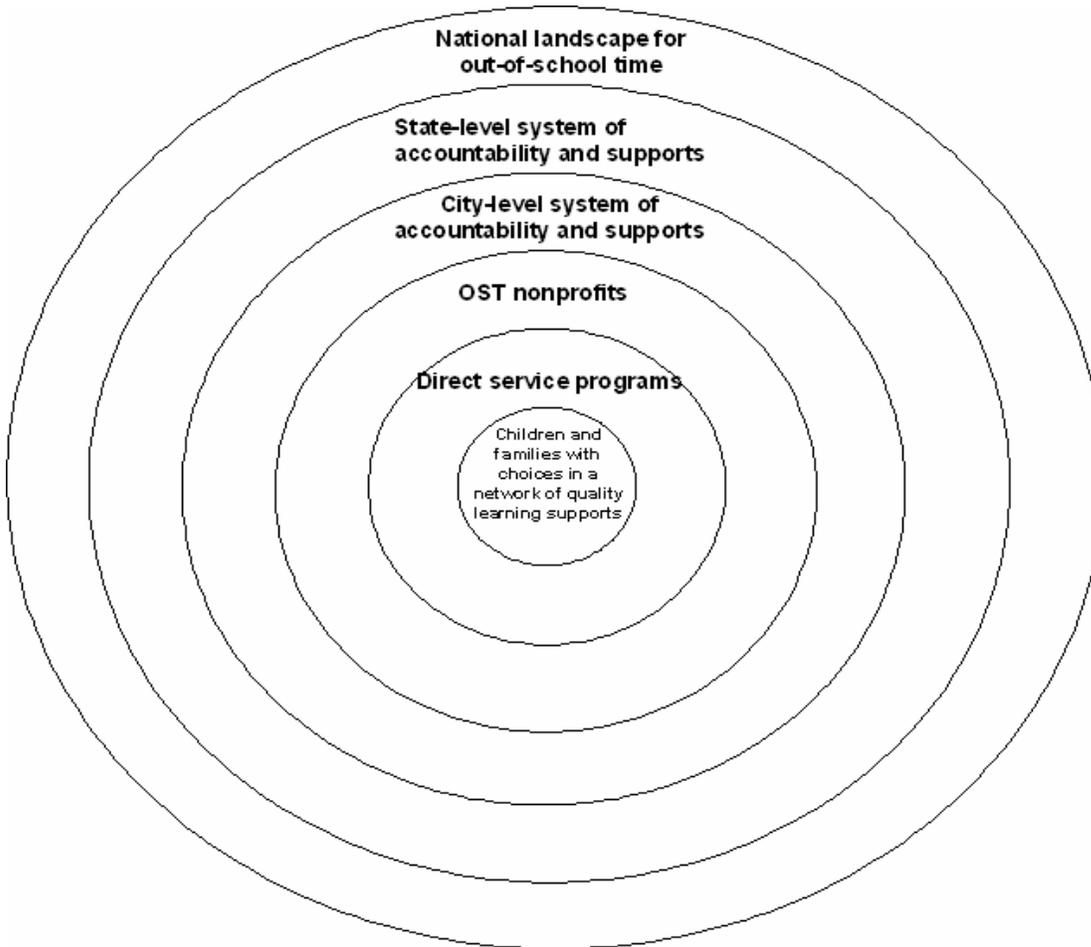
### **OST Nonprofits in an Ecological Model**

This paper is written to provoke a broad discussion about what is necessary to meet the challenge of developing more high-impact nonprofits that work together and with others to create a system of diverse and quality learning opportunities from pre-kindergarten through high school. We believe it is important to start this discussion, and this paper, by stepping back to look at the complex and rapidly changing context, or ecology, in which these nonprofits are currently operating. Figure 1 (next page) describes the nested set of contexts and relationships which affect and, in turn, offer opportunities to support the development of OST nonprofit organizations so that all can achieve the shared goal of providing children, youth, and families choices for participation in a network of learning and developmental supports.

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<sup>3</sup> Crutchfield, L. R. and Grant, H. G. (2008). *Forces for Good: The Six Practices of High-Impact Nonprofits*. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass. p. 46.

**Figure 1: An Ecological Model for OST Nonprofits**



- At the center of the model we have placed **children and families** who have choices about participation in a network of quality learning supports. A decade of research and evaluations of afterschool and summer learning programs and activities provides support for this central vision and its potential impact.<sup>4</sup> It suggests that sustained participation in well-structured, well-implemented, quality programs and activities, often provided historically and currently by OST nonprofit organizations, help youth attain the knowledge and array of skills necessary for success in the 21<sup>st</sup> century. Such programs support the development of cognitive, social, and emotional skills in youth, as well as the capacity to value and work with others, a healthy lifestyle, and more engagement in learning. Accumulating research and evaluation evidence

“When all parties with responsibility for and interests in the welfare of youth, especially disadvantaged youth, unite to engage them in high-quality after school experiences, they are more likely to succeed in promoting positive development for the highest number of children at risk.”<sup>5</sup>

<sup>4</sup> Little, P. M.D., Wimer, C. and Weiss, H. (2007). *After School Programs in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century: Their Potential and What It Takes to Achieve It*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard Family Research Project. <http://www.gse.harvard.edu/hfrp/projects/afterschool/resources/issuebrief10.html>

suggests that effective programs and activities are multi-faceted in that they combine academic support with other enrichment activities: they provide children and youth with opportunities to learn and practice a range of new skills through hands-on experiential learning. Recent research from the multi-site *Promising Practices in After School* study also suggests that as children move into later elementary school, they are less likely to participate only in after school programs and want choices amongst a variety of OST learning programs and activities in the community.<sup>5</sup>

- The next rim consists of the myriad of **individual direct service programs** that are directly responsible for implementing quality OST programming. They may or may not be affiliated with an OST nonprofit.
- Next, we situate the **OST nonprofits** themselves, and define them as stand-alone community-based organizations as well as those that are part of large national nonprofit organizations such as the Boys and Girls Clubs, Big Sisters and Big Brothers, 4-H, Girls Inc., Citizen Schools, and the like. Some provide only youth and after school programs and activities, while others are multi-service agencies such as Beacon Schools or settlement houses. Some manage a network of smaller programs and activities offered at multiple locations.
- OST nonprofits operate in the context of a **city-level system of accountability and supports**. In this rim we include citywide OST systems such as those funded by The Wallace Foundations; we also include the cities participating in the Collaborative for Building After School Systems (CBASS). The functions of these city systems include supporting sustainability of programming through effective policy and advocacy efforts. We also include community-based foundations that fund OST nonprofits and direct service programs as well as city-level funding streams for OST.
- Next, all of these levels function within a **state-level system of accountability and supports**. Included in this rim are state education agencies responsible for administering 21<sup>st</sup> Century Community Learning Centers resources; statewide advocacy efforts; and statewide systems building efforts such as the C. S. Mott Statewide Afterschool Networks.
- Finally, the outer rim represents the **national landscape for out-of-school time**. In this rim we include federal policies (like No Child Left Behind), federal funding (like the 21<sup>st</sup> Century Community Learning Centers grants program) advocacy organizations (like the Afterschool Alliance), and the national funders who are working to improve the OST arena through their philanthropic investments. We also include the research and policy organizations working to support the development and expansion of quality learning opportunities across the day and across the year; in this group we include the Harvard Family Research Project, the National League of Cities, and the Council of Chief State School Officers.

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<sup>5</sup> Reisner, E., Vandell, D., Pechman, E., Pierce, K., Brown, B., & Dolt, D. (2007). *Charting the Benefits of High-Quality Afterschool Experiences*. Washington, DC: Policy Studies Associates and Irvine: University of California. Available at <http://www.gse.uci.edu/docs/PASP%20Charting%20the%20Benefits.pdf>

## Value of the Model

The ecological model situates OST nonprofit organizations in the larger context of national policy, educational, and nonprofit trends and demands in order to stimulate a broad view of the key leverage points for building more high-impact nonprofit organizations that contribute to the central vision for learning. It illustrates a primary premise of this paper: that **there is an inter-dependency among and between OST nonprofits and all the levels in the model, and investments in one level have implications across the all the levels.** As we will discuss in our Recommendations section, this premise then unhooks a set of strategic investment choices about which level to target for capacity-building. As this paper will argue and as its recommendations reflect, a number of the emerging issues and challenges facing these nonprofits are beyond the capacity of single or a few organizations to handle. They require network, coalition, or field – and in some cases cross-field – supports.

## Overview and Roadmap of the Paper

The paper begins with a brief scan of major trends in the overall nonprofit sector that affect the development and future of OST nonprofits. The next section examines seven key capacities where OST nonprofits are challenged as they strive for high impact both within their sector and across the ecology in which they operate, pointing to specific organizational weaknesses that are part of these challenges. The final section of the paper lays out a set of investment options to reframe OST nonprofits in a new learning context.

We relied on three primary sources of information for this paper. First is our longstanding experience in the OST and youth services arena compiling research and evaluations, tracking current policies, and working with local, city and state OST programs, systems and intermediary organizations. We also sought input on the issues facing youth-serving nonprofits from OST leaders who helped to frame our thinking with respect to the capacities that these organizations and supporting intermediaries need in order to achieve impact and to be part of new systems of learning opportunities. Finally, we drew on the latest frameworks and concepts about high-performing nonprofits, particularly those laid out in *Forces for Good, High Performance Nonprofit Organizations*, and *Shaping the Future of After-School*.<sup>6</sup>

## Section I. Major Trends in the Nonprofit Sector

Youth-serving organizations are influenced by several major trends that have been sweeping the entire nonprofit world, as well as by several trends that are unique to their own sector.

- Over the past several decades, the nonprofit field has grown as a result of more public contracting for nonprofit service provision.
- This growth has increased demands for results-based accountability, better outcomes, data-driven organizations, and a more entrepreneurial and business-like approach to both fund raising and organizational management.

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<sup>6</sup> Crutchfield and Grant (2008); Letts, C., Ryan, W., and Grossman, A. (1999). *High Performance Nonprofit Organizations: Managing Upstream for Greater Impact*. New York: John Wiley and Sons, Inc.; Collaborative for Building After-School Systems. (2007). *Shaping the Future of After-school*.

- Smaller organizations, particularly, have had difficulty meeting these new performance demands, and efforts to support them have led to the creation of promising networks, joint service agreements and intermediaries.
- Finally, increased demands for efficiency and effectiveness have led to rightsizing, and to more mergers and consolidations in the overall nonprofit sector.

While the youth service field and the number of nonprofits within it have grown with the availability of public funds for out-of-school time programs and activities, resources to meet these new demands are scarce. Thus, many national as well as local youth-serving organizations struggle to stay alive, and look for alternatives to an uncertain future with potentially increased competition from larger and sometimes better-resourced competitors. They recognize that the OST services market is changing with the advent of new approaches to linking and aligning learning opportunities within a community and that they are going to have to adapt to this new configuration.

It is also clear that some OST nonprofits are in a better position than others to make an evidence-based case to their stakeholders (school and district personnel, city agencies, funders, etc.) that they can deliver the quality services necessary to improve an array of learning outcomes. These organizations have a potential advantage, then, in the discussions about new learning partnerships. They also understand that the decisions that they and funders make in the next few years will be important in determining the shape of the new market for supporting community-wide learning supports in the future, and their role in it, whether as competitors or collaborators. As described in detail below, all of these trends are having important consequences for OST nonprofits and are shaping the vision of what a high-impact nonprofit positioned for the future looks like.

## **Section II. Seven Organizational Challenges of the OST Nonprofit Sector**

OST nonprofits, like other nonprofits in other arenas, face a set of organizational challenges to providing quality direct services for children and youth. However, rather than focus on specific capacities or weaknesses of specific nonprofits, this section of the paper takes a step back to look across the OST nonprofit sector and describe a set of challenges shared by many OST nonprofits. Specifically, it identifies seven primary challenges facing the sector, which map onto the key capacities that OST nonprofits need if they are to achieve their intended impact, capacities which we know from related literatures are critical to high performance.

It is important to note that much of the research on high-impact nonprofits has been conducted by studying large-scale, multi-site nonprofits. However, our experience in the OST arena indicates that whether one is operating a stand-alone program or a set of programs, or conducting a large-scale initiative, the organizational capacities required to function effectively cut across specific program sizes and types. A central question we will address in our recommendations, then, is given that the capacities cut across all levels of the ecological model we have presented (Figure 1), where in the model should capacity building occur?

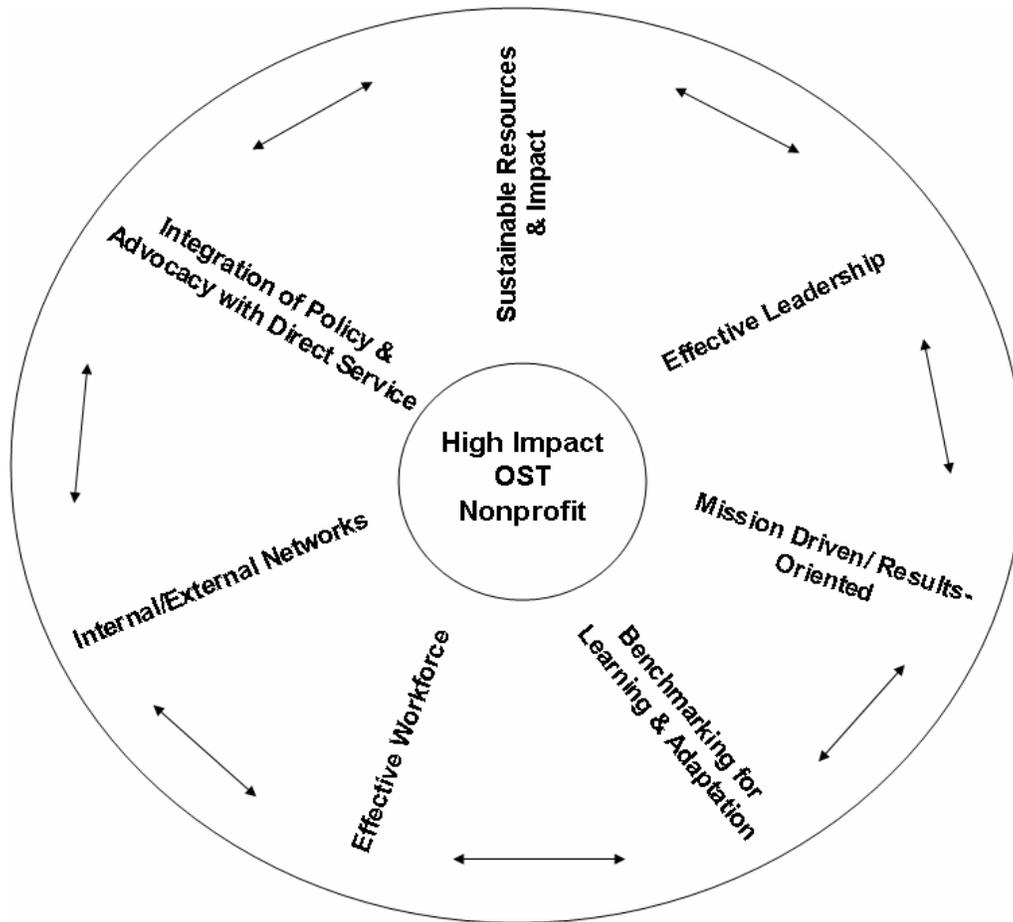
The seven capacities we have identified are listed briefly below. Following this description, and for the rest of this section of the paper, we provide greater detail about how each of these capacities might look in the OST nonprofit sector.

- Effective leadership. First and foremost, many OST nonprofits are challenged to find and cultivate the leadership necessary to manage complex, results-oriented organizations, which, by necessity, high-performing OST nonprofits need to be.
- A mission-driven/results-oriented approach. Second, high performance does not reside in effective leadership alone. OST nonprofits need to adopt a mission-driven, results-oriented approach increasingly necessary for survival in a competitive funding environment, an approach which requires the capacity to collect and use data for accountability and learning.
- Ability to benchmark and use information for adaptation. Third, related to the challenge of being mission-driven and results-oriented, adequate benchmarking and accountability systems are critical in enabling nonprofits to track their performance and feed evaluation information back into the organization in order to adapt and change to meet shifting field and client demands.
- Development of an effective workforce. Fourth, good benchmarking and accountability systems help to support and develop an effective workforce. Absent data to inform workforce improvements efforts, these efforts become scattershot at best; thus, the nonprofit fails to maximize its scarce professional development resources. Further, workforce improvements are often considered synonymous with professional staff development, and without benchmarking systems, little attention is paid to the organizational and policy support necessary to make professional development “stick.”
- Creating and maintaining internal and external networks. Fifth, the capacity to network effectively is key to survival. When OST nonprofits don’t network effectively, they cannot take advantage of resources within their own organization, as well as in the community, that could be leveraged to support and improve service delivery. This is a particularly important capacity to develop as OST nonprofits position themselves to be effective in a new context for learning which requires the capacity to be adroit partners.
- Integrating policy and advocacy with direct service. And without these networks, OST nonprofits are then challenged to conduct a sixth critical function of a high-performing nonprofit – the integration of advocacy and policy into their direct service activities. Increasingly, we observe that the successful OST nonprofits are weaving advocacy activities into their direct service efforts as part of “business as usual” in an effort to promote both their own sustainability and the sustainability of the sector.
- Developing and implementing a sound sustainability plan. Seventh and finally, sustainability requires more than good advocacy – it requires sustaining ideas, sustaining relationships, and sustaining resources. Many OST nonprofits do not adequately plan for the future, so caught up are they in their day-to-day, month-to-month provision of direct service. They need resources not only to feed into more and better direct service, but also to shore up the entire set of organizational capacities identified above.

Figure 2 illustrates how these inter-related “forces for good” could potentially yield a high-impact OST nonprofit that supports the provision of quality direct services. It is important to underscore that while this section of the paper individually examines each of these seven capacities in relation to OST nonprofits, in reality these capacities are inter-

related, like the spokes of an umbrella; when one capacity is weak, it lessens the integrity of the entire organization. Further, as we will illustrate in the Recommendations section, we believe that these “forces for good” operate across the ecology of the entire OST nonprofit sector, not just within individual nonprofits.

**Figure 2. A Framework for the Capacities of High-Impact OST Nonprofits**



**Effective Leadership**

The leader of an OST nonprofit drives an organization’s capacity to improve in all other features of a high-performing nonprofit. What does effective leadership mean for an OST nonprofit? Effective leaders know the difference between operations (making plans to implement direct service programs on a daily/weekly basis) and strategy (setting the mission, vision, and values of the nonprofit), which latter they are then responsible for implementing, if not creating. They spearhead benchmarking efforts and are responsible for setting a climate of learning and innovation within an organization. OST nonprofit leaders need to be networkers *par excellence*, knowing when to seize partnership opportunities and leverage resources for the greater good of the OST sector rather than for their own incremental gains. Effective OST leaders also need to network and partner effectively with others beyond their circle – with city leaders and agencies, with schools, and with leaders in other nonprofit sectors like health and early childhood. An effective leader knows how to operate in advocacy circles to promote the public and political will

necessary to sustain their own and other OST nonprofits. Finally, an effective leader knows how to promote and sustain effective staff. Yet the lack of capacity in all these areas across the OST nonprofit sector points to a lack of effective leadership in the sector.

Many OST nonprofit leaders grew out of the OST service delivery sector; they rose to the top without any formal training or background in leadership and management. Other leaders, swooping down on OST from the for-profit sector, bring management models and business practices ill suited to the OST nonprofit sector. Also plaguing the OST leader is a lack of clarity about what leadership in this context means. In this paper we argue that OST leadership requires taking responsibility for all aspects of organizational capacity, but this is not a common expectation of the field. For many, an effective OST leader is one who is adroit at keeping the doors open – through fund-raising, through advocacy, and through sheer sweat and determination. But seldom in the OST nonprofit sector are leaders identified because they are strategists with the vision and skills, described above, so necessary to high performance.

#### **Effective OST leaders**

- understand the difference between operations and strategy
- make decisions that are mission-driven and tied to strategy
- spearhead benchmarking efforts
- set a climate of learning and innovation
- adapt to new ideas and trends
- create and expand networks
- advocate effectively
- promote and sustain staff
- engage their Boards

A discussion about the challenges of effective leadership is not complete without at least a short discussion of the role of the nonprofit board. While we do not have evidence to suggest there are weaknesses in the way boards operate, we want to put a placeholder in this discussion about boards' potential role in shoring up nonprofits in at least three of the capacities described below: helping keep the nonprofit mission-driven and results-oriented; establishing clear measures of success; and engaging internal and external constituencies to support networking and advocacy efforts.

#### **Mission-Driven/Results-Oriented**

Successful nonprofits are mission-driven and results-oriented, and their leaders understand that an effective nonprofit management cycle begins with articulating the program's strategy. This involves establishing the program's purpose (the mission); its short and long-term goals (the vision); and charting the internal "compass" that will guide the nonprofit's work (its values).<sup>7</sup> The primary mission of OST nonprofits of the 21<sup>st</sup> century is to provide and support quality direct services for young people and their families, with the vision that doing so will support positive learning and development throughout the day and the year, and across the child's development. The shared values of OST nonprofits include providing realistic choices for young people in order to reflect their developmental needs and the needs of working families.

While this seems fairly straightforward, the next steps in the strategy cycle are where many OST nonprofits are challenged – translating the strategy into a plan of operations and setting realistic metrics of success which map onto the plan of operations (e.g., being results-oriented). At the heart of the challenge lies the need to develop an underlying theory of change to help programs move from strategy, to implementation, to realistic outcomes.

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<sup>7</sup> Kaplan, R.S., and Norton, D. P. (2008). *Mastering the Management System*. Harvard Business Review, January 2008, pp. 63-77.

Yet too frequently we observe that OST programs operate without an underlying theory of change, and too often this leads to poor evaluation results. For too long, OST programs have set program goals based on outcomes that they perceive others wanting them to achieve, such as improved test scores, rather than goals based on the services they are delivering. While the trend is shifting toward more realistic expectations for OST programs, the need to be results-oriented remains crucial for program sustainability, as well as for operating in a new learning context. Being results-oriented means synching the nonprofit's mission and vision with its programmatic activities and then setting goals that best reflect the intended outcomes of the activities. In a mission-driven/results-oriented nonprofit, operations decisions are cross-walked with the mission to ensure that the services provided are aligned with the overall strategy. OST leaders, along with their senior staff, are responsible for this alignment. In the section below we talk about benchmarking as a way to remain mission-driven and results-oriented.

### **Benchmarking for Learning and Adaptation**

“Benchmarking is an organizational learning process that bridges the gap between great ideas and great performance.”<sup>8</sup> The process of benchmarking offers an organization the opportunity to identify how it is doing relative to other, like organizations, as well as to use that information to develop and implement strategies that will help improve its own performance and service delivery. While many OST nonprofits understand that they need to collect data for accountability purposes, few understand that that data have the potential to effect powerful change within the organization. Even if they do understand its potential, many OST nonprofits lack the organizational capacity to conduct benchmarking.

But what does “benchmarking” really mean? At the heart of effective benchmarking is a “cycle of adaptation,” which can help OST nonprofits find their “sweet spot” between exploring new possibilities and shoring up the best existing direct services.<sup>9</sup> Indeed, the notion of developing a learning, or adaptation, cycle is not new. A decade ago HFRP produced an issue of *The Evaluation Exchange* (Vol. IV, No. 3-4, 1998) on learning organizations, placing a continuous learning system at the heart of a successful learning organization. Figure 3 below illustrates this cycle, contextualized to an OST nonprofit.

The five steps in the learning cycle seek to create continuous opportunities for the development and use of relevant information; for encouraging corrective actions, risk taking, and participation; and for recognition and rewards for performance improvement.<sup>10</sup>

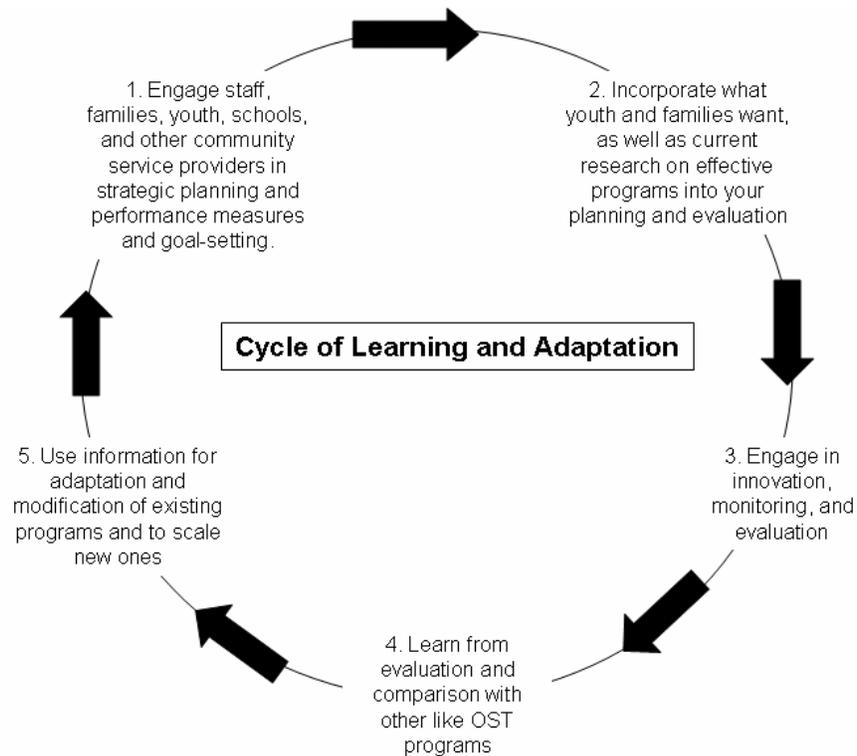
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<sup>8</sup> Letts et al, p. 86.

<sup>9</sup> Crutchfield and Mcleod, Chapter 6.

<sup>10</sup> Adapted from Weiss, H., and Morrell, W. (1998). Useful Learning for Public Action. *The Evaluation Exchange*, v. IV, No. 3-4. <http://www.gse.harvard.edu/hfrp/eval/issue12/theory.html>

**Figure 3. A Learning Cycle for OST Nonprofits**



1. *Engage staff, families, youth, schools, and other community service providers in strategic planning and performance measures and goal-setting.* Activities in this step include obtaining resources and commitment to learning, specifying performance goals, identifying research and evaluation questions and gaps, and designing an overall learning agenda, including a theory of change.
2. *Incorporate what youth and families want, as well as current research on effective programs into planning and evaluation.* Activities here include assembling resources, specifying outcome and process measures and data to support them, networking to share successful innovations and identify common problems, and identifying technical assistance needs and providers.
3. *Engage in innovation, monitoring, and evaluation.* Activities include continuously testing new ideas and approaches, designing evaluation, and monitoring and assessing process and progress with performance measures, evaluation, and data.
4. *Learn from evaluation and comparisons with other, like OST programs.* Activities include using monitoring and evaluation information for corrections and improvement, using benchmarking to examine progress of the program and/or field of practice/policy, and assessing and applying knowledge from relevant basic and applied research.

5. *Use information for modification and adaptation of existing programs and to scale new ones.* Activities here include identifying gaps for further research and transferring knowledge for continuous improvement across the OST nonprofit sector as well as nonprofits in related sectors.

Implementing this cycle requires an organizational mindset committed to learning. It requires a de-siloing of department units so that evaluation people are talking to program people. It requires a leader and a nonprofit board willing to take risks and find out what is working, and – more importantly – what is not. But the benefits of benchmarking can easily outweigh the resource and human capital costs. Effective benchmarking improves a nonprofit’s problem-solving capacity, providing OST nonprofit leaders, boards, and other stakeholders with information to improve services and increase effectiveness.

Before we move to the next capacity it is important to place a “reality check” on what OST nonprofits can and should be held accountable for. The cycle of learning and adaptation (Figure 3) depicts accountability at the program or organizational level, addressing the question, “Are we doing the right things well enough to make a difference?” This is an appropriate question for OST nonprofits to ask themselves. However, there is at least one additional level of accountability, namely community accountability for setting and monitoring the overall indicators of how children and youth in the community are faring on community-wide indicators. OST nonprofit services may have impact at this level, but it is beyond what they should be held accountable for. As our recommendations will reflect, there is merit in building capacity to benchmark at both of these accountability levels, but the latter benchmarking responsibility thus should not be placed on the shoulders of the OST nonprofit sector.<sup>11</sup>

### **An Effective Workforce**

An organization’s capacity to deliver quality OST services largely depends on the quality and capacity of its workforce (including direct service providers and OST leaders) and the pre- and in-service training, professional development, and workplace supports that they receive. A recent review of the literature on workforce development, conducted by HFRP, proposes that workforce development is a complex construct with three inter-related components: (1) Education and professional staff development, including pre-and in-service training, workshops, and *in situ* coaching and mentoring; (2) Organizational supports, including an organizational mindset that values program improvement, administrators who support training and advocate for better compensation and conditions, adequate and supportive supervision, shared decision-making, and a strong performance management structure; and (3) Policy supports, including quality ratings, accreditation standards, certification, and career ladders.<sup>12</sup>

Yet our review of the OST workforce literature reveals that most workforce investments take the form of the first component – education and professional staff development – and even that is not implemented very well, relying primarily on “one shot” workshops and

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<sup>11</sup> The authors are grateful to Dale Blyth, University of Minnesota, for contributing this nuanced framing of accountability.

<sup>12</sup> Harvard Family Research Project. (2007). *Changing the Conversation about Workforce Development: Getting from Inputs to Outcomes*. Houston, TX: Cornerstones for Kids. [http://www.cornerstones4kids.org/new\\_reports.htm#anchor5](http://www.cornerstones4kids.org/new_reports.htm#anchor5)

trainings which have been demonstrated to be less effective than more concentrated coaching and mentoring techniques. Coupled with poorly implemented professional development experiences is the field-wide debate about training: For what? Is there a core set of competencies that all OST providers should have? Should providers have content training? Or training in working with young people? Or both? Or neither? The field is fractured on answers to these questions. Still, the most recent research indicates that an ongoing system of training, coaching, monitoring, and analysis not only improves staff skills, but also contributes to overall program quality.<sup>13</sup>

Moving beyond education and professional staff development, little to no investment is usually made in building the organizational supports necessary to make the professional development “stick.” In addition, inadequate policy supports render a transient, untrained, and underpaid workforce.<sup>14</sup> Like other workforces (e.g., juvenile justice, child welfare, and early childhood) the OST workforce has a set of recruitment and retention issues that impede the delivery of quality services –

wages and compensation, manageable workloads, opportunities for advancement, medical insurance, and job satisfaction, to name a few. These issues go beyond merely high wages and related compensation to reveal a workforce that cares deeply about its work environment and opportunities for growth and success, yet struggles to make a livable wage and find career advancement opportunities.

**What makes professional development “stick?”<sup>14</sup>**

- an organizational mindset that values program improvements
- leaders who value staff development
- staff schedules to allow time for professional development
- supportive supervision to give feedback on performance
- effective performance management structure, which drives evaluation information into staff practices

**Internal and External Networks**

At the most basic level, “a network is a group of related things that work together to achieve a larger goal.”<sup>15</sup> Essentially, networks can make a whole greater than the sum of its parts, and may even do so with some resource efficiencies. However, a competitive funding climate, scarce resources (human as well as financial), and a lack of a shared vision for children and families means that all too often, nonprofit OST programs operate either in a vacuum, or by only reaching out to a few like-minded others, thus not harnessing the potential networking power of their communities. Adopting a network mindset means shifting from an organization orientation to a network orientation. Table 1 (below) describes this shift.

Nonprofit OST programs need to think about making this shift on three levels: 1) networking within the organization to move to a more matrixed or de-siloed structure; 2) networking with other, similar OST nonprofits; and 3) networking beyond the OST nonprofit sector to support children’s learning and development.

<sup>13</sup> Sheldon, J., and Hopkins, L. (2008). *Supporting Success: Why and How to Improve Quality in After School Programs*. Philadelphia, PA: Public/Private Ventures.

<sup>14</sup> HFRP, 2007. *Changing the conversation*.

<sup>15</sup> Crutchfield and McLeod, p. 108.

**Table 1. Defining a Network Mindset<sup>16</sup>**

	<b>Organization Orientation</b>	<b>Network Orientation</b>
<b>Mindset</b>	Competition	Collaboration
<b>Strategy for Impact</b>	Grow the organization	Grow the OST sector
<b>Typical behaviors</b>	Compete for scarce resources Protect knowledge Develop competitive advantage Hoard talented leadership Act alone Seize credit and power	Increase funding pie for all Share knowledge Develop skills of competitors Cultivate and disperse leadership Act collectively Share credit and power
<b>Structure</b>	Centralized (siloeed)	Decentralized (matrixed)

Networking within an OST nonprofit: Earlier in this paper we proposed that a high-impact nonprofit is one that is adroit at getting and using data through benchmarking and accountability systems. Central to this capacity is having organizational structures in place that enable learning to occur, and this in turn requires cross-functional teams of people from different units within the nonprofit, coming together for the specific purpose of learning, improving, and innovating. This is particularly important for two nonprofit teams – evaluation and programming. It is when these two teams intersect that program improvements occur: direct services get modified; professional development needs are surfaced; and evaluators learn to ask new questions of interest and concern to program staff.

Networking with other OST nonprofits: Most OST nonprofits currently have an “organization orientation.” They are in survival mode and view other OST nonprofits as the competition. But efforts like the Collaborative For Building After-School Systems (CBASS) point to the enormous potential and benefits of groups of OST nonprofits’ coming together to form networks. As CBASS’s report *Shaping the Future of After-School* describes, networks of OST nonprofits can perform and share responsibility for many of the capacities that, we argue in this paper, nonprofits need to support quality direct service provision – strengthening and supporting the workforce; supporting research and evaluation; and promoting sustainability. This networking capacity seems particularly critical to the OST nonprofit sector and thus one of our recommendations will focus on how to improve this capacity.

Networking across sectors: The capacity to network across sectors is at the crux of what OST nonprofits need to survive in the new education era. The successful nonprofits will be the ones that know how to work with schools, community-based agencies, and city governments to garner resources to partner with them. Many OST nonprofits scramble to figure out how to get into that game. Other OST nonprofits know that they want to work with others on a shared agenda of supporting learning and development, but don’t know how to form partnerships. In both cases, the nonprofits need to have effective leadership that understands the potential benefits of working with others, not only to improve the choices of learning opportunities for the children and youth whom they serve, but also for their own organizational sustainability. If the education trend toward thinking more holistically and seamlessly about time and learning continues – and all evidence points to its doing so – then OST nonprofits must develop ways to network, not only with schools but also with other community-based organizations (health, mental health, family supports, early childhood, etc.) who share the overall vision for children and youth in their community.

<sup>16</sup> Adapted from Crutchfield and McLeod, p. 109

### **Integration of Policy and Advocacy with Direct Service**

Successful OST nonprofits now blend policy and advocacy with direct service to achieve greater impact. Our review of about ten large direct service providers indicates that all of them are conducting policy/advocacy activities even when they were not directly funded to do so.<sup>17</sup> But to them policy/advocacy is not part of “business as usual.” This is a loss, because when policy/advocacy efforts are informed by direct service and direct service is informed by policy/advocacy, the two create a “virtuous cycle” in which policy and advocacy enter a synergistic relationship where the strength and success of one are integrally connected to the strength and success of the other. In this cycle, nonprofits that are providing direct services are in a unique position to harness grassroots support in the form of their direct service providers and the families they serve. By operating direct service programs, nonprofits are closer to the problems facing the children and youth in their communities than the national advocacy organizations. Therefore, they can propose and test policy solutions that will best meet the needs of their communities.

Why, then, don’t more OST nonprofits integrate policy/advocacy with direct service? The answer, in part, lies in the challenges we have already laid out. Conducting policy/advocacy work is not done in a vacuum. It requires engaging and mobilizing networks of like-minded, mission-driven organizations such as one’s own. It requires leadership with an appetite for “getting into the fray” for the greater good. It requires the capacity to have credible data to use for policy arguments. It requires effective workforce development that builds advocacy skills while also promoting the skills for direct service provision. Finally, it requires internal structures that promote shared dialogue about the role of advocacy as a shared responsibility. And, as we have laid out here, many OST nonprofits are challenged in these capacities.

### **Sustainable Resources and Impact**

Sustainability is a huge challenge for OST nonprofits. Not only are they challenged to raise sufficient resources to maintain current direct service provision, they are being pushed to expand and scale their efforts to ensure that more children and families have more quality choices about how to best spend their out-of-school time. But what are OST nonprofits trying to sustain? Previous work on the sustainability of community-based initiatives points to four inter-related aspects of sustainability:<sup>18</sup>

1. Sustaining the *organizations* themselves or the projects being funded, particularly when the initiative has created new organizations or encouraged organizations to move in new strategic directions.
2. Sustaining the *ideas, beliefs, principles, or values* that an initiative is based on or promotes.
3. Sustaining the *relationships* between the organizations involved in the initiative, particularly when a purpose of the initiative has been to foster collaboration.

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<sup>17</sup> HFRP is evaluating a foundation’s efforts to promote integrated learning and this finding emerged as part of our evaluation efforts.

<sup>18</sup>Weiss, H. Coffman, J. and Bohan-Baker, M. (2002). *Evaluation's Role in Supporting Initiative Sustainability*. Cambridge, MA: Author.

<http://www.gse.harvard.edu/hfrp/pubs/onlinepubs/sustainability/index.html>

4. Sustaining the *outcomes* of the initiative. Programs are not only interested in seeing that the results they achieve under the initiative sustain over time, but also are increasingly pressured to show that what resulted from their considerable investment and effort has value beyond the term of the initiative.

Sustainability for an OST nonprofit, then, requires harnessing all the capacities previously described to ensure that adequate financial resources are in place to implement services with quality; core principles and beliefs of the organization are embraced by members of the organization and those who provide the direct services; networks are in place to support each other and the sector as a whole, including networks to complement in- and out-of-school learning; and adequate benchmarking and accountability systems are in place to demonstrate collective impact over time. Given the challenges articulated above regarding each of these capacities, it is not surprising that the bottom line of OST nonprofit sustainability is that it is fragile, at best, and needs shoring up.

### **Section III. Opportunities for Investment**

Our recommendations for investment options are based on the three core principles around which we have framed this paper:

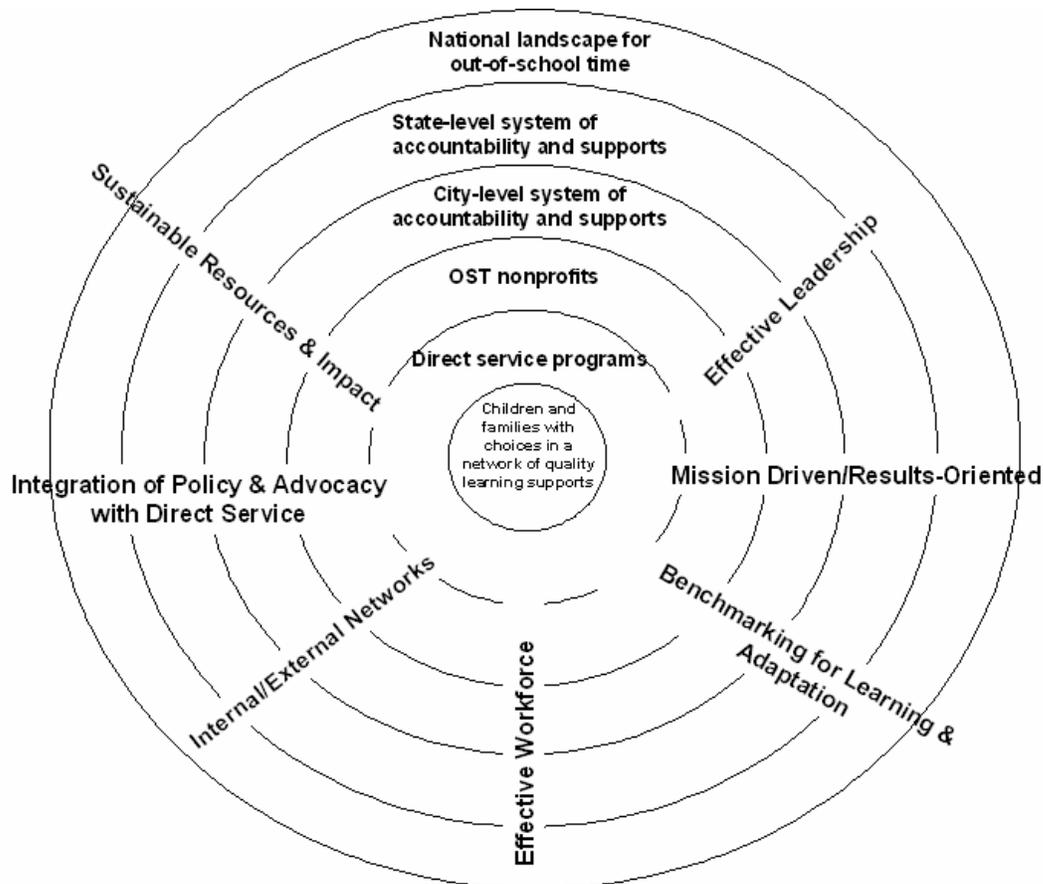
1. *OST nonprofits sit within a complex and dynamic ecological system* which is comprised of children and their families, direct service programs, city- and state-level systems of accountability and supports, and a shifting national landscape for the OST arena as a whole. All of these actors influence a nonprofit's capacity to achieve impact, and thus influence strategic investment choices. Thus, investments to shore up individual nonprofits may be necessary but not sufficient to move OST nonprofits into the high-performing arena in which they need to play in order to survive in the new context for learning. This principle is illustrated by Figure 1.
2. There are *seven key capacities that OST nonprofits need to have, and they are inter-related and interdependent*, so that efforts to improve one capacity can and should have an effect on other capacities. This principle is illustrated by Figure 2.
3. *OST nonprofits need to adapt to a new context for learning*, one which requires adroit networking and skilled advocacy, to create networks of learning and developmental choices for children and families across the day, across the year, and across their developmental trajectories.

Therefore, to guide our recommendations and the strategic choices that foundations need to make regarding OST nonprofit capacity building, we have developed an ecological framework for OST nonprofit capacity building which takes the framework for high-impact OST nonprofits (Figure 2), and overlays it on our OST nonprofit ecological model (Figure 1) to depict a dynamic, inter-dependant framework for the organizational capacities of the OST nonprofit sector (Figure 4).

The investment options that follow are all based on the proposition that to make informed choices about capacity building, foundations should use the ecological framework as a diagnostic tool to identify the key challenges and opportunities for

capacity building within and across each level, and as a road map for grantmaking in support of OST nonprofit capacity-building.

**Figure 4. An Ecological Framework for Building the Capacity of the OST Nonprofit Sector**



Specifically, our review points to seven options for investment to improve the organizational capacities of OST nonprofits in order for them to be high-performing in their efforts to achieve a shared vision for children and families to have choice in a network of quality learning and developmental supports:

1. Cultivate Adaptive Leadership in OST Nonprofits
2. Build and Maintain Networks
3. Develop Effective Workforce Systems
4. Build Capacity to Benchmark for Learning and Adaptation
5. Fund a Study on the Costs of Developing Organizational Capacity
6. Establish a Capacity-Building Innovation Fund
7. Convene to Position OST Nonprofits in a New Context for Learning

Before we describe these options in detail, it is important to articulate the implications of applying this model to foundation capacity building efforts.

### Making Strategic Investment Choices

Application of the ecological framework for OST nonprofit capacity building requires foundation leadership to consider a set of strategic choices about investing in OST nonprofit capacity building:

➤ *Will investing in the capacity at the nonprofit level be sufficient to effect lasting impact?* For example, will enabling OST nonprofits to use more resources for advocacy work be enough to enable policy advocacy efforts, or do we also need to couple that investment with supports to advocacy organizations that can work with the OST nonprofits on a common advocacy agenda?

➤ *Where is the best “home” for the capacity-building investment?* There are times when organizational capacity building is best housed within the OST nonprofit itself. For example, improving a mission-driven/results-oriented approach to service requires working with the nonprofit to develop an underlying theory of change to guide programming and evaluation. However, as proposed above, efforts to improve the OST workforce may be best situated at the community systems level, where training and professional development opportunities can be centralized.

➤ *How do we need to change our grantmaking to support organizational capacity building?* Nonprofits constantly struggle with the fact that most of their resources, both human and financial, are earmarked for direct service, leaving little time and scarce money to devote to building the organizational capacities that this paper argues are necessary to achieve the impact that stakeholders, including funders, expect. Foundations that are serious about improving organizational capacities of nonprofits may need to change their current approach to grantmaking. The box on this page poses four key questions for foundation leadership to consider.<sup>19</sup>

#### **Key Questions for Foundation Leaders**<sup>19</sup>

1. *Will the grants we make give nonprofits the organizational supports necessary to achieve their program goals? Are enough staff allocated to delivering quality services? Are adequate management and data systems in place to support program development?*
2. *What internal capacity do we as a foundation need to build organizational strength at the nonprofit level? Do we have staff who understand organizational capacity building? Do we have discretionary resources to respond to specific capacity needs that arise during the lifecycle of a grant?*
3. *Is our grant portfolio too heavy on program innovation at the expense of organization building? What is the portion of grant funds that can be used for organization building? Is the portion sufficient? Should we build incentives for organizational improvements?*
4. *Are we close enough to the nonprofits we fund to help them build organizational strength? Program officers tend to work with OST nonprofits on their program delivery models, but could they not also help nonprofits examine their organizational capacity issues?*

With these questions as a backdrop, the paper concludes with a set of investment options for local, regional, and national funders that are concerned about building the capacity of OST nonprofits to thrive in new era of education reform.

<sup>19</sup> Adapted from Letts et al p. 102.

## **Option 1: Cultivate Adaptive Leadership in OST Nonprofits**

The section on organizational challenges began with a discussion of effective leadership for a reason: effective leaders are the drivers of effective organizations. While there are some efforts underway to document, describe, and improve the leadership capacities of OST nonprofits, there is a need for strategic investments in this area. For example, the Center for Summer Learning has recently launched an on-line professional development module for OST leaders. As an advisor to that effort, HFRP was engaged in early conversations about what skills and capacities an effective OST leader needs, and from those conversations a module was born. However, this is an isolated attempt that will reach only a handful of aspiring leaders.

A strategic investment to improve the capacities of OST leaders is to develop an OST leadership institute, particularly focused on “*adaptive leadership*” – defined here as being able to manage “the conditions that enable people involved in complicated social issues to figure out and undertake solutions that ultimately require changes in their own ways of working”.<sup>20</sup>

Adaptive leadership is a result-oriented process which requires leaders to play a clear and forceful role in keeping their staff and other stakeholders productively focused on the problem at hand. Contextualized to the leader of an OST nonprofit, then, adaptive leaders need to help their OST nonprofit reposition itself as a “player” in a new education era which requires collaboration and a focus on shared results for the children and youth in a community.

### **What is Leadership Capacity?**

To expand leadership capacity, organizations must not only develop individuals, but also develop the leadership capacity of collectives. They must develop the connections between individuals, between collectives within the organization, and between the organization and key constituencies and stakeholders in its environment.

Building on the work that others in the field are doing to develop leadership training, a component of the training, inspired by an effective organizational capacity building effort conducted by three San Francisco Bay Area foundations, should be the establishment of a “learning cohort” of the leaders undergoing the training. The purpose of the learning cohort is to provide the leaders with ongoing peer support and “active reflection.” In such a model, outside experts are brought in as speakers and all participants are required to attend meetings, at which they share obstacles and successes from their own organizations.

**With this investment option, local, regional, or national funders should develop an application process to solicit leaders of OST nonprofits committed to building their capacity to adapt to the new education reform context, and bring them together in a learning cohort to share and learn from each other about best practices** in working with schools, community-based organizations, and others who share a holistic vision of learning across the day, across the year, and across developmental contexts.

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<sup>20</sup> Heifetz, R., Kania, J., and Kramer, M. (2004). Leading Boldly. *Stanford Social Innovation Review*, Winter 2004.

## **Option 2: Build and Maintain Networks**

A clear message from the nonprofit literature is that networks are key to survival, yet as discussed above, many OST nonprofits have a competitive rather than collaborative mindset. Given the move toward a more blended, networked approach to the provision of learning and developmental supports, it is critical that nonprofits get help in becoming better at networking with each other and with others who are also providing services to children and youth (such as schools, health agencies, etc.).

In their grantmaking, foundations can play a role in shifting this mindset in at least four ways.

1. First, they can *encourage joint grant proposals* that demonstrate strong partnerships between at least two OST nonprofits, or an OST nonprofit and another sector which supports children's learning and development. They can also create incentives for increasing partners and networks.
2. Second, they can *convene grantees, in person and virtually, to share best practices and knowledge development*. Many foundations already do this through annual grantee meetings, but it should be incorporated as business as usual any time a foundation provides grants to a cohort of grantees. Further, foundations could do a better job of supporting networking throughout the life of the grant cycle, not just at yearly convenings. Supporting grantee listservs, blogs, and other forms of virtual communication helps grantees stay networked.
3. Third, as described above, networking takes leadership; thus, a requisite component of any OST *leadership training* needs to be a focus on how to develop networks and partnerships to support the provision of a range of developmental supports and opportunities in a community.
4. Finally, foundations can play a more pro-active role in encouraging *the integration of direct service with advocacy* so that coalitions of OST nonprofits can be mobilized to have greater policy/advocacy impact. While many foundations cannot directly fund lobbying, they can support the knowledge creation, policy forums, and other activities that support advocacy efforts.

Investing in networking will help OST nonprofits in a number of ways as described above, but investing in *intentional networks of OST nonprofits* is a strategy that could enable them to achieve economies of scale on basic business functions like benefits, as well as to learn and improve their direct services through shared data systems which can "feed" the nonprofits information for staff and program improvements. The need for networks of OST nonprofits is particularly critical in cities and communities which do not have a systems-level organization, or that operate in cities so large that the system is already strained to support the direct service component of the nonprofits. **Considering the ecological model, we suggest that foundations can invest in creating another rim of the model – networks of OST nonprofits – which sit between the individual OST nonprofits and the city-level systems.**

A related investment centers on the direct service programs themselves. While most of this paper describes efforts to build capacities from the nonprofits outward in their ecology, at the center of the model are children and families participating in quality direct

service programs. **In communities which lack any OST nonprofits, there is an opportunity for funders to create networks for direct service programs which could essentially operate like an OST nonprofit**, thus maximizing individual direct service investments to support basic organizational capacities across the programs. This form of direct service program network is probably best funded by local and regional foundations who are most likely already funding cohorts of direct service programs.

### **Option 3: Develop Effective Workforce Systems**

Developing an effective workforce, as described above, requires more than the development of competent staff. An effective workforce is one that is well-trained, has good human resource supports, and is sustainable. While some OST nonprofits have their own training departments, many do not. By resource necessity, these need an external system of professional development supported by an OST intermediary like Baltimore's Safe and Sound Campaign. Relying on a city-level intermediary to develop a system of professional development supports is cost effective and promotes a more unified approach to training, thus ensuring some consistency in service delivery across the sector.

Further, while investing in OST nonprofit leadership may yield an organization with a "learning mindset" that enables professional development to stick (e.g., providing release time to attend trainings, offering on-site coaching, dedicating staff meetings to reflect on staff performance), no amount of training will offset the real need for a livable wage and career advancement. The recruitment and retention issues that plague the OST sector in general cannot be addressed through improving organizational capacity alone. They require investments in state and national policy advocacy work to improve compensation and develop career lattices that will enable OST leaders and providers alike to enter and stay in the OST workforce.

**Thus, an investment strategy for improving the capacity of OST nonprofits to support an effective workforce should integrate investments across many sectors within the OST arena, using the ecological model to diagnose and identify the key entry points for workforce development across the OST nonprofit ecology.**

Specifically, such a strategy would include investing in OST nonprofit leadership capacity as described above, coupled with investments in a city or community level intermediary who can support a system of professional development. It would also include investments in groups such as CBASS, the Mott Statewide Afterschool Networks, and the Afterschool Alliance, all working to improve local, state, and federal policies for after school, including policies which affect wages and compensation.

To make investments in workforce capacity, foundations need to consider the questions posed earlier about strategic investments choices. A local funder may decide to work with a city-level system to develop and implement system-wide professional development trainings and related supports. A regional funder may decide to target investments toward improving the capacity of a set of OST nonprofit network leaders to use evaluation information to improve professional development efforts. A national funder may opt to target resources toward groups working on macro-issues of compensation and accreditation.

#### **Option 4: Build Capacity to Benchmark for Learning and Adaptation**

One of the challenges of the OST nonprofits is the capacity to benchmark and use information for learning and adaptation. The learning cycle (Figure 3 above) proposes a process for OST nonprofits to use to conduct the benchmarking that we and others argue is critical to a nonprofit's ability to have impact. Like the capacity to deliver effective professional development, some OST nonprofits (like Citizen Schools and Boys and Girls Clubs of America) have well-funded evaluation units which can perform a benchmarking function using balanced score cards and other well-established means to track and compare performance.

However, in *Shaping the Future of After-School* it is noted that “gathering, analyzing, and comparing performance and outcome data can be costly and technically demanding responsibilities that are often beyond the fiscal and technical ability of individual providers.”<sup>21</sup> Thus, funders are left with the option of attempting to shore up benchmarking capacity one nonprofit at a time, or investing in more systemic efforts to track performance of sets of nonprofits within a system.

The advantages of thinking more systemically about benchmarking are threefold:

1. Benchmarking sets of programs enables greater diversity of the sample for comparative purposes.
2. As *Shaping the Future* points out “intermediaries can perform [benchmarking] tasks efficiently, and with a degree of independence that is valuable to providers, funders, policymakers, schools, and parents.”<sup>22</sup>
3. Thinking systemically about benchmarking and accountability helps address the need to think about levels of accountability and who is responsible for which level. In a previous section of the paper we argue that nonprofits should be accountable for what they are doing directly and that they should use the cycle of learning and adaptation (Figure 3) to inform and improve programs and services. Considering benchmarking from a systems perspective moves accountability to a community-wide level, where setting and monitoring the overall indicators of how children and youth in the community are faring on community-wide indicators is the responsibility of an entire system of learning supports, not any individual OST nonprofit.

**A recommendation of this paper, then, is to invest at the city/community level in developing a system for benchmarking *both* within the OST nonprofit sector *and* across the other sectors which support learning and development** (schools, parks and recreation departments, health agencies, etc.). This investment option requires **funding a collaborative at the city level** to convene OST stakeholders (direct service programs, OST nonprofits, schools, city agencies, other local funders, etc.) to develop a set of benchmarks for which all parties responsible for the well-being of the children and youth in the community could agree. It also requires **providing support to create a data collection system** to track the benchmarks over time, analyze the results, and use the information to make improvements across the various sectors.

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<sup>21</sup> Collaborative for Building After-School Systems, p. 3.

<sup>22</sup> *Ibid*, p. 3

### **Option 5: Fund a Study on the Costs of Developing Organizational Capacity**

Some progress is being made on understanding the cost of delivering quality direct service, but what does it take to provide the organizational capacities necessary to support direct service? No one really knows. Thus, **a promising investment strategy is one that includes a well-funded study of the costs of organizational capacities.** Are certain capacities less costly than others? Are there sets of capacities that can be developed simultaneously to reduce costs? Considering the ecological framework, where is the best strategic “home” for organizational capacity building investments? – At the nonprofit level? The city or state systems level? And does the answer differ according to which capacity one is trying to impact?

In addition to conducting new studies, much can be learned from current efforts to invest in large-scale organizations. Several foundations have invested in building capacities of OST nonprofits (like Edna McConnell Clark and The Atlantic Philanthropies), but these investments have not been tied to understanding the true costs of capacity building. Harvesting knowledge from these investments could provide valuable information to help understand the real costs of supporting organizational development.

### **Option 6: Establish a Capacity-Building Innovation Fund**

The previous five options take a “top down” approach to organizational capacity building. They all suggest that a foundation knows what the ecology of the OST nonprofit sector needs. However, our sixth option is more “grassroots.” **We propose that, rather than invest in a specific organizational capacity building area such as leadership or networking, foundations establish a capacity building innovation fund to help nonprofits build capacities in the areas of their own choosing.** We propose that criteria for receipt of funding include the application of some of the basic principles laid out in this paper:

- That organizations are interested in improving an *inter-related* set of capacities; for example, using data from benchmarking to improve the workforce, or building the capacity of leaders to do more policy/advocacy work.
- That organizations must *partner* with other nonprofits to receive the funding, thus promoting networking.
- That organizations must reach *across levels*, to consider how the capacity-building effort connects with and impacts at least one other level of the ecology; for example, investing in adaptive leadership capacity in order to improve a nonprofit’s capacity to conduct policy advocacy activities, which would focus on ensuring more funding for the direct service programs.
- That the capacity building effort be tailored to how it positions the OST nonprofit to be effective in a *new learning context*; for example, investing in improving networking across OST nonprofits and city-level systems to ensure that children and families have choices among a network of quality learning and developmental supports.

**Recipients of the innovation grants awards will receive technical assistance from the foundation, and consultants as necessary, to implement their capacity**

**building proposals. They will also convene periodically as a learning cohort to share ideas and challenges and learn from each other.**

This nonprofit-led approach to capacity building could be supported by local, regional, or national funders, and should **include a commitment on the part of the foundation to document and track the effort so that others may learn from it.**

### **Option 7: Convene to Position OST Nonprofits to be “Forces for Good” in the New Learning Context**

This paper has laid out a set of challenges facing individual OST nonprofits as well as the ecology in which they operate, and has developed a dynamic model to use as a framework for strategic investments to build their capacity. If the vision laid out in the opening quotation of this paper becomes reality, the OST nonprofit of tomorrow will look very different from the one of today. It will be operating in a new learning context, with blurry borders between all the places where young people learn and develop – after school programs, summer programs, schools, health organizations, etc. Further, if the vision of a network of quality learning and developmental supports becomes a reality – if OST nonprofits work with each other and with schools, families, and health organizations to create an array of accessible, developmentally appropriate, and effective after school and summer learning choices for all children across the day and year, particularly those who are economically or otherwise disadvantaged – then the notion of a specific OST nonprofit sector may become obsolete.

Therefore, **foundations must show leadership in helping OST nonprofits develop and adapt their capacities** to ensure their necessary and critical presence across their ecology, outward toward the national landscape, and inward toward providing quality direct services. This paper has laid out a set of investment options for such leadership. But foundation leadership and investment alone will not be sufficient to position the OST nonprofits in the new learning context. As the ecological model underscores, the survival of OST nonprofits does not rest solely within their own sector; it depends upon interactions between the multitudinous direct service programs, city and state-level systems, and national organizations that support them.

Thus, our final recommendation is that **funders of OST, education, child health, and family convene a working group of national, state, and local experts on youth development and education, including representatives from the OST nonprofit sector.** The working group’s charge is to **help to reframe the role of nonprofits to ensure that in every community, children, youth, and their families have a network of good developmental choices to support learning across the day, across the year, and from birth through adolescence, and that the nonprofits that emerge from this effort truly are “forces for good.”**

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