

**THE JOURNEY
OF
THE LEARNING COMMUNITY:**

**TOWARD SUSTAINABILITY
OF NONPROFIT MANAGEMENT
EDUCATION PROGRAMS**

**Report of the
Building Bridges Between Practice and Knowledge
in Nonprofit Management Education
Learning Community Meeting
Washington, D.C.
October 18-21, 2000**

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Preface

In 1997, the W. K. Kellogg Foundation funded a five-year initiative titled *Building Bridges between Practice and Knowledge in Nonprofit Management Education*. Members of project leadership teams from 19 U.S. projects and 8 programs in Latin American countries have assembled in *Learning Community Meetings* four times. This report is the last in a series of three reports on the *Journey of the Learning Community*.

Throughout the meeting, we asked participants one basic question: What does this final learning community meeting mean for you and your project team? Participants had no trouble answering this question, and most persons went on at some length. However, the answers clustered around a few clear themes which seemed to represent the mood and consensus of the full group: “taking stock of what has been accomplished,” “solidifying the connections we have made among each other,” “using the bridge that is being built across the country and the continents,” and “looking to the future to unleash the resources that have been created and nurtured.”

I. INTRODUCTION

At the fourth and final meeting of the Learning Community, once more participants highlighted the process of the Building Bridges Initiative as a nested series of journeys – journeys of discovery, innovation, change, and wisdom. The meeting in Washington, D.C., October 18-21, 2000, began to build a new bridge to the public. At the same time, the meeting continued to build bridges among Initiative projects, team members, and academic faculty and nonprofit leaders.

Participants also came full circle in addressing the overarching theme of the changing relationship between private, public, and nonprofit sectors. Throughout, the speeches and conversations focused not only on the separation between the three sectors, but also on the ways that nonprofit management education must use perspective and knowledge from each sector. It was acknowledged that the nonprofit sector leads in nurturing civil society, which has a large hand in

determining the common good. Additionally, today's nonprofits, and their leaders, must be able to stay competitive in the private marketplace, help carry out governmental policies, ensure accountability, and encourage and manage participation in community volunteerism and service.

This is a tall order. It is also one not yet completed. But Bridges team members have engaged for three years in building a learning community that has helped the sector and the individual projects move towards the goal. The meeting in Washington, D.C made it clear that the learning community holds great promise to sustain itself as a body through which members can continue to meet the challenges of building a new field.

In presenting the successes and challenges demonstrated in the Washington, D.C. learning community meeting (LCM), we use the same conceptual framework that we have used throughout our documentation of the previous LCMs: (1) building relationships, (2) engaging in collective action, and (3) identifying and addressing issues of power. This year, again, the themes played out in multiple ways:

In words. Five speeches were delivered at the meeting. The speeches captured current trends in United States and Latin American societies, higher education, philanthropy, and the W.K. Kellogg Foundation's grant-making activities. Andrés Thompson, for instance, summarized the spirit of the Bridges Initiative in building partnerships for the development of nonprofit management education, and for social change in the words of Paul Simon and Art Garfunkel, "Your time has come to shine/All your dreams are on their way/See how they shine/Oh...If you need a friend/I'm sailing right behind/Yes..Like a bridge over troubled water."

In demonstration. All Bridges teams showcased their projects in tabletop exhibits to an invited group of guests representing diverse areas of the nonprofit sector – umbrella associations, infrastructure organizations, higher education organizations, government, and foundations. But there was also much movement among exhibits by Bridges participants themselves, as they dialogued with one another and exchanged materials detailing their projects' accomplishments. In fact, the most animated conversations we witnessed were among the Bridges participants themselves. It was clear that participants were proud of their accomplishments, and there was much discussion about the hard work and collaboration that had occurred to achieve the successes.

In celebration and relaxation. From the opening dinner until the meeting's closing, there was much interaction among participants. There

was deep discussion. There was also good humor, testament to participants' enjoyment of one another. During meals and in hallways, people connected with one another again, picking up on the threads of their last interactions, and moving the conversations on to their next level.

Purpose of the Meeting

The meeting began on Wednesday evening, October 18, with a reception, welcome, and dinner. Participants represented nineteen U.S. project team, eight Latin American partner teams, Initiative consultants, and staff from the W.K. Kellogg Foundation (WKKF).

In the opening remarks via videotape, William Richardson, WKKF president and chief executive officer, and Anne Petersen, WKKF senior vice president-programs grounded the purpose of the Initiative as one in which "community" and "education" can come together in innovative partnerships to chart nonprofit management education, and help strengthen civil society. Both speakers emphasized the notion of engagement, with the message that strengthening connections will result from all members of the partnership reaching out to each other in innovative ways. WKKF sees its investments in nonprofit management and in engaged institutions of higher education as ways of creating a foundation for these linkages to become stable within the United States and Latin America.

Bob Long, program director, philanthropy and volunteerism, and Andrés Thompson, program director, Latin America and Caribbean Programs at WKKF, welcomed the participants and emphasized the larger context of the Initiative. The context entails building bridges between North and Latin America in order to provide global dimensions of, and insights into, building nonprofit management education. While "the bridge" will necessarily look different in both hemispheres, the common aim is to help strengthen civic infrastructure, foster citizen participation, and prepare nonprofit leaders who can lead and manage across public, private, and nonprofit sectors.

Katheryn Heidrich, president of CenterPoint Institute, then highlighted several connecting strategy meetings that had occurred among projects since last year's meeting in Buenos Aires. CenterPoint Institute implemented a mini-grant program to support strategies that would offer project teams opportunities to link, exchange ideas, and focus on mutual areas of interest or concern. Seven minigrants were awarded. All U.S. and Latin American projects had at least one team member participate in at least one connecting strategy. Descriptions and results of each of the strategies were documented in reports, which were bound

and distributed to all LCM members.¹ These reports noted that the opportunity to work together in smaller groups on focal areas of concern yielded greater understanding of each project, and resulted in specific agendas for future action.

To illustrate the enthusiasm generated and the content of a connecting strategy, Felipe Portocarreo, Universidad del Padifico, presented a summary of the connecting strategy, “Nonprofit Management and Social Responsibility in Latin America: An Inventory of Activities and Publications.” This strategy has involved all the Latin American academic institutions in the Bridges Initiative. The project addressed two goals: a) the preparation of an inventory of courses, programs, and other activities that each institution offers in nonprofit management and social responsibility, and b) the compilation of a bibliography on these issues in Latin America. This collaborative effort, according to Portocarreo, will provide a basis for the growth and effectiveness of nonprofit management education in the future. Further, these data will be seen as providing a base through which different stakeholder groups can come together to share resources and expertise.

Structure of the Meeting

At the opening session, Katheryn Heidrich provided an overview of the meeting and identified its dual purposes. The first purpose, focused on the audience of learning community participants, was to discuss transition issues as the Initiative enters its final year. To address this purpose, the meeting provided opportunities for Bridges teams to summarize what occurred as a result of their WKKF grants, discuss the future of their projects, and plan for the last year of the Initiative.

The second purpose focused on an external audience of leaders in nonprofit organizations, higher education, and Third Sector press. To attract the attention of these leaders and to disseminate information about projects, Bridges teams had the opportunity to display and promote their projects to an invited group of guests.

The first full day, October 19 was devoted to reflecting on and cataloguing project accomplishments, as well as considering future directions. In the morning of October 20, LCM members and guests assembled to hear speeches by Dan Moore, vice president-programs, WKKF; Sara Melendez, president and chief executive officer of Independent Sector; and Constantine Curris, president, American Association of State Colleges and Universities. In the afternoon of October 20, guests were invited to an exhibit area where Bridges projects had

¹CenterPoint Institute, *Connecting Strategies Reports*, Building Bridges Initiative, Fall 2000.

tabletop displays of their work in nonprofit management education. Bridges teams also had opportunity to meet to plan their Initiative capstone experiences. On October 21, Bob Long and Andrés Thompson gave closing remarks, and there was a general session on closing reflections for all LCM members.

II. ANALYSIS OF THE JOURNEY

Learning communities do not just form spontaneously; they grow and are nurtured over time as they move toward identifying and achieving their potential. Three aspects of learning communities are particularly relevant: relationships, action, and power. As in our past reports, we focus on these dimensions.

Building Relationships

In our past LCM reports, we noted the importance of building relationships in creating a community in which people can learn from one another, share resources, and engage in mutual action. Building relationships refers to stocks of social trust and reciprocal relationships that develop between people in networks of engagement. Strengthening bonds between people, and the information that flows between their connections, helps develop a fledgling field.

Personal Relationships. We have observed Bridges team members as they forged and solidified relationships over the course of three LCMs. Steadily, a climate of synergy has increased with each LCM, culminating in the 2000 meeting where people appeared more at ease with one another than ever before. Beginning with the opening dinner, where teams introduced new team members, the atmosphere was one of camaraderie and collegiality. Most individuals moved from table to table at some point in the evening, greeting one another warmly, sharing stories, and catching up on news.

In the closing group reflection on the final day, almost all participants spoke about the importance of being part of a group, both within their own projects and within the learning community. It was this sense of membership and trust that allowed the work to move successfully forward. Many participants lingered in the hotel lobby to chat after the meeting was officially over.

Exploring Professional Relationships. Perhaps more impressive than personal relationships was the growth in professional relationships among members. This year, there appeared to be less distinction made by participants between identities and professional affiliations as either “academic” or “practitioner.” On the whole,

individuals identified themselves with their project teams, rather than as “academic” or “practitioner.” It was clear to us that professional identities had been shared across groups, that participants had discovered how to access and discuss the knowledge and skill that existed among “different” groups, and most importantly, that these explorations have resulted in the creation of teams that respected each other.

In the breakout discussion groups, we also observed less emphasis on assumptions about working in academic or practitioner arenas than at previous LCMs. Far more attention was devoted to asking one another questions. More than at previous meetings, individuals listened as often as they spoke. Consensus came easier. In one breakout session on the second day, for example, participants easily identified the ways that academicians and practitioners each brought necessary skills to the design and implementation of service learning programs in higher education. In another breakout session, there was frank discussion about the strengths and weaknesses of offering nonprofit management in higher education as compared with delivering such service through community organizations or coalitions. In brief, a deepened awareness of the complementary roles academics and practitioners can play while striving towards the same goals was present.

Over the course of the past year, projects engaged in several connecting strategy meetings with one another. As we spoke with participants, it became clear that these smaller, face-to-face meetings contributed to comfort among members, a sense of partnership, and a forum for collaborative problem solving. Indeed, when we asked participants to think back about what they will most remember about the LCMs, the connecting strategy meetings were mentioned almost as much as the Buenos Aires experience.

These observations are consistent with findings from the *Voices of Wisdom* research project. In the summer of 2000, a majority of project team members were interviewed about their experiences in serving on project leadership teams. Many respondents expressed pleasure in the relationships they formed with teammates, and with other project team members, as a result of participating in the Initiative. Statements such as the following were common:

- This initiative has exposed me to many talented people.
- The quality of the people is outstanding...We have made some wonderful connections due to BBI that will outlast the BBI.
- I've learned a tremendous amount from the LCMs. I have been able to call people in BBI...it's been really valuable.

A report on the *Voices of Wisdom* study was disseminated to participants prior to the LCM.²

Engaging in Collective Action

In the Bridges Initiative, planning and action were envisioned to occur both within local projects and across projects. Collective action during the past year resulted in an impressive array of project accomplishments, as well as cross-project accomplishments.

Action Within Projects. One morning of the meeting was devoted to an activity entitled, “So What Happened?” All teams charted their accomplishments across ten areas. Not every project team listed achievements in every area, of course. Yet, most projects listed concrete actions in several of the areas. Most of the successes were attributed to the leverage that came with the WKKF investment:

- Important diversity issues were addressed, which allowed the projects to reach new partners, constituencies, and audiences in more effective ways.
- A range of curricula, instructional materials, and credit programs were developed.
- Collaborations, partnerships, and alliances between universities and programs and external organizations were initiated or strengthened.
- Collaborations and alliances between projects and other internal departments or entities were initiated or strengthened.
- Applied research projects were carried out and the results disseminated.
- Seminars, workshops, conferences, and other non-credit programs were begun, enhanced, and expanded.
- Student scholarships were initiated or expanded.
- Student recruitment and access was an area for which most projects did not list specific accomplishments. However, as several teams explained,

² Linda Camino and Katheryn Heidrich, *Voices of Wisdom: Knowledge and Experience from Practitioner-Academic Teams in the Building Bridges Initiative*. CenterPoint Institute, 2000.

student recruitment and access are bound up with addressing diversity issues and increasing minority student participation.

- Technical assistance and service provided by some projects helped build capacity among community nonprofits, or helped nonprofits link with consultants and other technical assistance providers.

- Technology to increase access to educational programs or information was developed and expanded. Courses were offered on-line and through satellite series, databases were compiled and made available online, and information networks were established through electronic venues.

In addition, the activity, which charted achievements on cards placed on walls, provided opportunity for all Bridges teams to see the collective achievements, as well as to pose clarification questions. Many team members spoke of activities that eluded categorizations, such as the time spent to nurture effective collaborations. Others spoke of the intangible ways that the project “elevated their status” in their higher education or community homes. The collaborative experiences and increased status provide a solid foundation for continued shared action within the projects.

The public *Showcase for Nonprofit Management Education* on the third day of the LCM provided a forum for celebrating the action. Each project highlighted their achievements. The displays were prepared in ways that described -- in words and photographs -- the collaborative nature of the work. Practitioners and academicians were seen working together. The photographs included university and community settings. The dissemination materials and brochures conveyed similar messages.

Action Across Projects. At the 1999 LCM in Buenos Aires, a series of small group discussions was held to encourage project teams to explore possibilities of connecting with one another around issues of mutual interest and concern. Even before the meeting in Buenos Aires, CenterPoint Institute pilot-tested the connecting strategy concept with the Western States Meeting in June 1999. Participants in that meeting enthusiastically reported its success at the larger LCM. They described how the smaller forum had fostered forthright discussion, opportunities for all to have their voices heard, and the development of next steps formed through consensus.

After the meeting in Buenos Aires, CenterPoint Institute announced a mini-grant program whereby Bridges participants could link and continue small group work

initiated at the LCM. Seven connecting strategy projects were funded, addressing the following topics:

- Curriculum Development Information Exchange.
- Faith-Based Connecting Strategies.
- The Intercultural Proficiency Project and Web-Based Distance Learning: An Exploratory Collaborative Initiative.
- Leadership Diversity Model and Dissemination Project.
- Nonprofit Management and Social Responsibility: An Inventory of Activities and Publications.
- Nonprofit Management Education: An Exploration into Multifaceted Approaches to Curricula, Student Markets, and Delivery Systems.
- Practitioners Workshop: Connecting Communities, Practitioners, and Programs.

Indicative of the value added to participants were appreciations they wrote in their final reports about the connecting strategy products. Participants expressed the value of creating partnerships with one another across teams.

Identifying and Addressing Issues of Power

A structurally based, underlying tension of nonprofit management education revolves around issues of power between academics and nonprofit leaders, between institutions of higher education and nonprofit organizations, and between different institutions of higher education. Not surprisingly, participants in the learning community brought these issues to the table, grappled with them, and debated each other. The Initiative supported this discussion. Each project was required to have a leadership team, composed of academic faculty and nonprofit practitioners. A primary premise of Initiative designers was that achievement of quality education programs in nonprofit management depends on the full engagement of both academics and practitioners because knowledge is developed by, and resides in, both. Also, the majority of Initiative projects contain a community outreach and collaboration component offering professional development courses to practitioners, engaging in applied research, or assisting in organizational and community development efforts.

Consequently, learning community members did not shy away from debates about power over the past three years. It appears that important strides and resolution have been achieved. Unlike in previous years, practitioner members of the Initiative did not caucus at the Washington, D.C. meeting to discuss issues of power and feelings of marginalization from academic colleagues, both within their projects and the Initiative itself.

The mood at this year's LCM in discussion of these issues was less impassioned and more reflective than at previous meetings. On the afternoon of October 19, participants broke into four discussion groups to address elements of continuation and transition, as the formal grant period draws to a close. The topics were:

- **Durability:** What factors contribute to the sustainability of an academic program?
- **The Voice of Practice:** How can Bridges participants continue to create and maintain systems for engaging the voice of practice in the development of educational programs?
- **The Voice of Higher Education:** How can Bridges participants influence practitioners and nonprofit organizations to engage the voice of higher education and to use educational resources to improve management and leadership in the sector?
- **Continuing Relationships:** What are some ways Bridges participants can build on or continue relationships developed across the Initiative?

All of the breakout discussions contained a strong theme of academic-practitioner collaboration, higher education-nonprofit partnership, shared learning and two-way flow of information. There was general agreement that nonprofit management education requires strong connections with practice. However, such partnerships take time and sustained focus and attention; they neither occur naturally, nor run on their own propulsion. Nonprofit leaders, faculty, and students often have different immediate needs and perceived interests. Nonprofit management education leaders must be committed to the ongoing effort of bringing unity to disparate agendas.

Across the four groups, common themes and strategies emerged for achieving successful partnerships that build on the differences in knowledge, skill, and power among academicians and practitioners. The first theme was that of

connection. Forging connections ultimately means, as one participant noted, “that true collaborative partnerships have to build on the critical human dimension of the endeavor.” This person-oriented strategy means that partnerships need to devote the time to information sharing, action planning, informal reflection and evaluation, and mutual support.

Specifically, participants stressed the importance of finding the time to a) identify the most salient issues and problems; b) mobilize the necessary resources and expertise to identify recommendations; and finally, c) coalesce the complementary skills and knowledge of community partners, faculty, and students to produce desired results. Setting and meeting collective agendas is difficult, but when achieved, result in the strong institutionalized partnerships that support future action.

Applied research was also discussed as a strategy for partnership. Research provides the opportunity for natural partnership between universities and nonprofit organizations. While community nonprofit organizations often have a legitimate need for needs assessments and evaluations, they do not always have the money, time, or expertise to carry them out, nor are they always offered a strong voice in determining research agendas and projects. To include practitioners in research planning, the Center on Philanthropy at Indiana University, for example, holds community discussion groups. Arizona State University’s Center for Nonprofit Leadership and Management held focus groups throughout the surrounding county to determine what types of programs the Center should develop.

Participants also discussed the potential role of higher education as a provider of professional development education programs not offered in the community, and serving as a convener of different entities. Most of the Bridges projects contain an element of continuing education for nonprofit leaders, and some are exploring the convener role as a way of bridging universities and local organizations. The caution, however, was that universities not duplicate programs and convening offered elsewhere in the community. Duplication, participants stressed, can lead to conflict and set a negative climate for collaboration.

Finally, in each of the sessions, participants spoke about the underutilization of nonprofit organizations as providers of management education and in being “teachers of university professors.” Participants identified a range of strategies to strengthen those roles. In many communities, it was noted, community organizations already provide continuing education. These efforts could be buttressed with university resources rather than higher education feeling that it is their obligation to be the center of a continuing education network. Also

discussed was that nonprofits can assist in experiential training of students by hosting them in internships. Practitioners, as attested through the Bridges project teams, can contribute wisdom and knowledge to campus teaching, advising, and the development of programs, including research. For example, both George Mason and Arizona State Universities have implemented practitioner-in-residence programs whereby practitioners teach courses. The teaching occurs not in the typical adjunct format in which instructors only come to campus for classroom responsibilities. Rather, the positions encourage practitioner-scholars to take an active role in the life of the campus by supporting their day-to-day presence on campus.

III. BECOMING A LEARNING COMMUNITY

As participants spoke of continuing the learning community they have built over the past few years, they noted that it has taken a period of three years to establish trust, and to build their own projects to a point where they were able to effectively bridge to other projects.

The afternoon of October 19 ended with brainstorming the primary benefits that individual members could derive from a continued learning community. In that session, participants expressed the hope that the community of colleagues that has been engendered by the annual meetings and other activities through the Initiative will continue in the following ways: a) opportunities to collaborate on issues of common concern; b) sharing of information and expertise; c) provision of technical assistance to one another; and d) reflection on achievements.

A number of potential benefits were identified that could result from sustaining the learning community in either formal or informal ways. The first of these was the “expert” feedback that could be provided to one another. Members can engage and spark collective problem-solving efforts. Others emphasized that they would use the network to create feedback loops. Now that they know about each other’s projects in more than a cursory manner, a few participants noted that they are better equipped to focus their questions and assistance to one another. The third general benefit of the learning community was the sharing of research. Not only could members bring knowledge of related research, but they could also engage in collaborative research with regard to salient issues. The fourth benefit of the learning community was to generate a sense of coherence of the nonprofit management education field. It was this benefit that seemed to resonate most broadly. Now, more than ever before, there is a desire to develop an overarching cohesive working group, as well as subgroups. The experiment with Connecting Strategies during this past year attested to the feasibility of this approach. That is,

participants used smaller group venues to improve their own work and to provide concrete avenues for working within the larger group.

A Vision for the Future

It is apparent to us that the learning community has created a collective vision for the future. Participants have looked to the past for lessons and have grappled in the present to create the current foundation. As noted throughout this report, there are many commonalities that will serve to launch and support further relationship building and collaborative action.

As the learning community stood poised, ready to enter the next phase of the journey of developing the nonprofit management education field, several speakers sketched their vision of the Initiative and the field.³

Dan Moore, vice-president-programs of WKKF, began by highlighting the links to Latin America, and stating his vision that the lessons learned in North America be disseminated South, and vice-versa. These links, he stressed, would allow the participants to “unleash” their power. In concluding, Moore stressed that unleashing power required the involvement of young people in the effort and continued reaching out and connecting to new audiences.

Sara Melendez, president and chief executive officer of Independent Sector, reminded learning community participants that the nonprofit sector in the U.S. comprises over one million organizations, ten million full-time equivalent employees, and 109 million volunteers. Melendez’s vision centered on the importance of developing nonprofit leaders who are confident and capable of assuming the enormous responsibilities the sector carries for ensuring good quality of life. Sara urged participants to take stock of the progress that had been made and to celebrate it as they move forward.

Constantine Curris, president, American Association of State Colleges and Universities, emphasized that the demands of modern society require continuous learning throughout adulthood.

³The text of all speeches can be found on the Building Bridges website at www.centerpointinstitute.org/bridges

Accordingly, education must be affordable, and offered through venues that can accommodate diverse life styles. His vision also included higher education institutions with career tracks for life in nonprofit management work. Achieving this vision will require the development of multicultural proficiency and overcoming parochialism. It will also require “knowledge from the campus transferred to the field, and knowledge from the field incorporated into the body of knowledge that shapes instruction on the campus.”

Common to each of the talks was the emphasis on the future challenge of developing leaders who are able to collaborate across public, private, and nonprofit sectors. While there is an array of knowledge and experience in educating leaders to be effective managers within organizations, approaches to managing complex partnerships and collaborations are less well developed. The future of nonprofit management lies in the ability to understand the collaborative systems that shape the sector, and to learn from exemplary managers how they manage these systems, and finally, to teach this knowledge and skill to students.

Bob Long and Andrés Thompson presented closing remarks that connected the future vision of WKKF with that of the nonprofit management education field.

Bob Long provided a history of WKKF’s involvement with improving nonprofit leadership and education, beginning in 1986 and continuing through the Bridges Initiative. Long emphasized that WKKF investments were diverse and broad-based, going to institutions of higher education, infrastructure organizations, community-based support centers, research, and student development. He reminded LCM participants to bear in mind that even as the Initiative enters its remaining year, it is far from over. The various projects have born fruit, and LCM members have built a strong collective group poised to enter the future. Long’s vision for the future included the following:

We hope that our targeted investments to date have created ‘currency’ for programs within higher education that will continue to pay dividends on campus in the form of faculty assignments, priorities for space, operating money, products and curriculum additions, to name a few ‘ripple effects’ from our grants. We hope that the Building Bridges partnerships have helped create currency for nonprofit leaders in the form of active engagement in the development of educational programs, recognition, and value for the education they receive, and improved capacities for the work.

Next, Thompson spoke of how WKKF has sought to link giving and philanthropy with the ideals of participatory democracy in Latin America. The Foundation

believes that philanthropy in Latin America should be a force to foster social change and civic responsibility, not a short-term donation. To fight poverty and build a just and equitable society, the philanthropy of altruism, participation, service, and inclusion are needed. These are the same values inherent in the movement to build civil society.

Thompson's vision included an emphasis on the value of volunteerism. Rather than being viewed as add-ons, the work of volunteers will be well woven into the fabric of the total work. Thompson also stressed the importance of building democracy within nonprofit organizations to serve as role models for the rest of society. Thompson recognized the opportunities and risks facing the nonprofit sector in Latin America, and hence his vision included an infrastructure of support of nonprofit managers and leaders to help the sector navigate "troubled waters." Towards that end, as in North America, efforts will be directed to help strengthen local training capacity to develop nonprofit leaders and managers. Leadership development will need to combine visionary leadership with skillful management to create a safety net of support in communities.

The Successes of the Learning Community: Mental Models, Mastery, and Celebration

A key challenge, of course, is how to achieve such an ambitious, collective vision. A current running throughout all the speakers' comments was the notion that the Bridges Initiative has contributed strongly, and will continue to contribute strongly, to building nonprofit management education. Moreover, common to each person's speech was the observation that nonprofit management education is now regarded as "critical to society," even though this awareness did not exist a decade ago, and no one knows precisely what will be needed for the long-term. As one person noted, "we had different starting places, different journeys, and different ending points."

At the outset of our analysis of the learning community meetings, beginning with the meeting in Battle Creek in 1998, we noted how effective learning communities were characterized not only by vision but also by ongoing debate and discussion towards the creation of mental models for action. By this standard, the Bridges learning community was of high quality indeed. Members seemed comfortable with the fact that they were all using different strategies in their projects and they started to see their efforts as complementary -- part of a larger whole of "the field." Critical also to the creation of mental models for future action is honest debate from different perspectives in order to push collective understanding. At the Washington, D.C. meeting we saw much

evidence of this type of interchange, hence a clear sign that the learning community had developed in a healthy manner.

One example is illustrative. We witnessed an honest debate among several participants regarding standards of success for nonprofit organizations. One view was that nonprofits should follow a business model, with growth and development measured by an increasing number of operating centers or programs produced. Another view held that the measure of success should be the overall value that the nonprofit adds to services or quality of life in a given locale. The point was not whether either view was more correct. All members in the dialogue quickly realized that they were not going to convince the others. Instead, there was awareness that developing nonprofit management as a field requires a diversity of efforts rather than unilateral approaches. Time will tell which measure will prove to be the most useful and under which circumstances.

Mastery is a third component of healthy learning communities. Whereas vision and mental models provide direction, mastery provides the means. Here again, the learning community appears successful. As was illustrated in the Showcase for Nonprofit Management Education, the Bridges Initiative has produced a plethora of approaches and programs. The collective action of Bridges projects has enriched the field of nonprofit management education by bringing ideas, resources, and disciplines together in new combinations and configurations. No single program, or couple of programs operating discretely, could hope to create such innovative impact.

Finally, celebration is a cornerstone to the success of learning communities. All of the participants whom we spoke with felt that the Buenos Aires LCM was, in essence, the *capstone* celebration of the collective learning community. That meeting, it seems, produced both the most learning and the most understanding among learning community members. It was a turning point.

In this final, upcoming year each Bridges project team will organize and hold its own capstone experience. At the end of the Washington, D.C. meeting, representatives from each project stood and highlighted their plans for capstone experiences. The diversity in plans reflected the diversity of projects. It was also evident that the capstones -- through celebratory events, recognition ceremonies, seminars and conferences, travel scholarships, and the like -- will help lead to sustainable changes in the nonprofit management educational field. Clearly, as Bob Long quoted Ralph Waldo Emerson in his closing speech, the Bridges learning community is at a point where "what we call results are beginnings."