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FEATURE

by H. Daniels Duncan**Accountability and Community Development Can Help Unlock an Abundance of Resources**

Local governments can create effective community change. How? By becoming community engagement organizations and bringing the community together—residents, associations, nonprofits, the business community, and government—to act collectively as coproducers of their community’s well-being.

Using results-based accountability (RBA), coupled with asset-based community development (ABCD), local governments can drive the promise of measurable change through community engagement.

HOW CAN RBA HELP?

The RBA structure, as developed by Mark Friedman, author and director of the Fiscal Policy Studies Institute, allows local governments to strategically focus their work on substantial community issues and, at the same time, build a culture of measurement and shared accountability.

RBA identifies quality-of-life conditions (population results) and the corresponding measures or indicators required to track their achievement, as well as the operational measures to track and improve the performance of programs and agencies.

RBA introduces the concept of “turning the curve” to drive long-term action by focusing on improving a quality-of-life indicator over time and not setting arbitrary numerical goals. “Turning the curve” recognizes that to create measurable change requires a variety of strategies beyond the delivery of services. Strategies must include resident action, media engagement, and public policy work to create sustainable long-term change.

The RBA framework allows local governments to develop effective community-based strategies and



enhance their service-delivery activities through the adoption of performance measures that more effectively track and improve the activities of local programs, agencies, and service systems. The performance measures answer these three questions:

- How much did we do?
- How well did we do it?
- Is anyone better off?

The RBA framework also helps government by engaging residents as partners and advocates rather than adversaries. Together, they set communitywide strategies and share accountability. This shared population accountability becomes the catalyst for sustainable long-term change because together government and residents systematically ask and answer the following questions.

- What are the quality-of-life conditions (population results) we want for the children, adults, and families who live in our community?
- What would these conditions look like if we could see them?
- How can we measure these conditions?
- How are we doing on the most important of these measures?
- Who are the partners that have a role to play in doing better?
- What works to do better, including no-cost and low-cost ideas?
- What do we propose to do?

RBA and ABCD are complementary processes. RBA starts with the ends we want for our children, families, and communities and works backwards to the means that will get us there. ABCD provides a robust way of looking at the means to get us there.

Mark Friedman, director, Fiscal Policy Studies Institute, Northwestern University

RBA provides a framework for local governments to identify the critical quality-of-life issues they want to address for residents as well as the indicators to track their progress. ABCD can provide the framework necessary to work collectively with the community—other governmental entities, nonprofit agencies, businesses, neighborhoods, and residents—to develop and implement the wide range of strategies necessary to turn the curve and create measurable impact.

POWER OF ABCD

Asset-based community development (ABCD) can help enhance community engagement strategies and provide an effective framework to answer the RBA questions 5, 6, and 7 through implementation of the wide range of strategies necessary to improve the results identified for action. Through the power of ABCD, many of the most effective strategies can be implemented with little or no additional financial resources.

ABCD is a place-based framework pioneered by John McKnight and Jody Kretzmann of the ABCD Institute at Northwestern University. Its foundation rests on a few simple truths: 1) everyone has gifts, 2) everyone has something to contribute, and 3) everyone cares about something and that passion is his or her motivation to act.

Strong, safe, and healthy neighborhoods and communities are built on the strengths and capacities of their residents and associations that call the community home. We cannot build strong caring neighborhoods without unlocking the potential of residents.

The traditional approach to community development is focused on providing services to address the community's and its residents' needs and deficits. The ABCD approach starts with discovering the assets and gifts already present in the community. This is followed by asking residents to share their gifts and connecting people with the same passions to act collectively and provide care.

The most successful community efforts include resident engagement and action (no-cost/low-cost solutions) working together with existing institutions and programs. We cannot achieve the results required without the strong engagement of the resources and efforts of residents as well as the work of institutions. To be truly effective, residents must join the effort as coproducers/cocreators of their own and their community's well-being.

ROLE FOR RESIDENTS

True resident engagement requires government and institutions to lead by stepping back and creating space for residents to be involved as producers. Initially, it is imperative to determine three roles: 1) what are the things that only residents can do; 2) what are the things that residents and institutions or government can accomplish together, as coproducers; and 3) what are the things that only institutions or government can do.

Traditionally, individuals have been relegated to one role, that of a recipient of service--a client, customer, or patient. As clients, individuals are objects of service, dependent on the professionals and institutions for their overall well-being.

To unlock the power of community, we need to rethink how to view individual residents. We must acknowledge residents' skills and identify their existing resources. We must expand their roles beyond that of a client to include serving as advisers and helping institutions provide more useful services.

But their greatest value is that of coproducers of their own and their community's well-being. Rather than just asking people what do you need, we need to ask "What can you contribute? How can you use your existing skills and resources to achieve what you need?"

Residents in the most successful and effective systems participate in all three roles. If a person breaks his leg, for example, he is rightfully identified as a client and patient. If an individual has particular knowledge about her neighborhood and its residents, she may advise an agency on how to most effectively serve the neighborhood and to define what services the neighborhood actually wants/needs.

As coproducers, residents become part of the solution. If we want to make sure that every household with young children has age-appropriate books to help them learn to read, neighborhood parents who have a passion for reading can organize a book drive. This activity does not require institutional or government resources.

There is a difference between care and service, and both concepts are needed to turn the curve. Care is what residents offer through their engagement. They share their assets, skills, and talents working collectively for the common good.

Service is what institutions and professionals provide as a means of addressing the problems of an individual or community. Both care and service are required to build a healthier, safer, and more prosperous community for all.

TUCSON NEIGHBORS LOOK OUT FOR SENIORS

In Tucson, Arizona, the Neighbor's Care Alliance is an extremely successful example of using care to help

turn the curve. Using RBA, the quality-of-life indicator identified to be tracked over time was the increase or decrease in the number of public skilled nursing home admissions as a percent of the total senior population in Tucson.

The goal of the Neighbor's Care Alliance is to help seniors living alone remain in their own homes longer, thereby avoiding higher service costs and potential institutionalization. It is based on the concept of neighbors caring for seniors living alone in their neighborhood.

PRO Neighborhoods, a partnership between Tucson, Pima County, Community Foundation, and United Way helped launch and support this effort to train neighborhood residents to:

- Identify seniors living alone in their neighborhood.
- Identify neighboring residents who have a passion for caring for seniors.
- Ask these people to care for neighborhood seniors who live alone.

Through this process, residents in the neighborhood provide care to seniors living alone by checking on them daily, bringing an occasional meal, shopping for them or taking them shopping, taking them to their doctor's appointments, or doing minor repairs for them.

This simple act of caring does not require professional services; it is a low-cost and potentially no-cost solution that enables seniors to live in their own homes longer and to thrive.

Neighbors caring for one another also stretches institutional resources by enabling agencies to focus their limited resources on the critical services that only institutions can provide (i.e., medically required services).

Without the care provided by neighbors, the potential exists that seniors would not receive the care they need because of high-service costs, and, conversely, local institutions may not be able to provide needed services due to inadequate funding and lack of service fees. In either event, seniors' quality of life would be negatively impacted.

ROLE OF LOCAL GOVERNMENTS

Governments can achieve their long-term goals by: 1) encouraging the work of neighborhood grass-roots leaders; 2) supporting neighborhood organizing to unlock the gifts of residents; and 3) collaborating with local institutions to recognize and more effectively use the power and resources of resident engagement.

To unlock the gifts in a neighborhood and encourage residents to share their gifts, local governments should support the work of grass-roots leaders and organizers to mobilize the residents of a neighborhood or community to share their individual gifts through the three acts of ABCD: discovering, asking, and connecting.

The role of neighborhood leaders and organizers is to:

- Discover the skills (gifts) of the individuals who call a neighborhood or community home.
- Ask them to share their individual gifts.
- Encourage them to connect with other individuals who have the same passions to work collectively for the common good.

To be effective in this effort, governments and institutions must abide by the beliefs that support effective resident engagement and institutional action, which will ensure the successful achievement of the

governments' real long-term results in their communities:

- Everyone has gifts.
- Relationships build stronger communities.
- A citizen-centered organization is the key to community engagement.
- Every resident cares about something and this passion is his or her motivation to act.
- Listening discovers passions and gifts.

To be effective in today's world, institutional and government leaders must recognize they need the resources of the community and its residents to achieve quality results.

WORTHWHILE JOURNEY

The combined use of RBA and ABCD has the potential to assist large and small communities achieve measurable results. RBA provides a simple understandable framework to identify quality-of-life conditions and their related indicators to drive collective action and the performance measures to track and improve individual programs and strategies. ABCD unlocks the resources of individual residents in communities while providing direction for more effective institutional action.

If your community has begun the journey to align resources around specific outcomes, you may want to explore--as a growing number of communities have--the power of increased community engagement through the combined application of RBA and ABCD. These complementary processes have the potential to unlock an abundance of resources to truly make a difference and change community conditions for the better.

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