Issue Brief #2: Building SIF Subgrantee Capacity for Scale, Evidence, and Impact
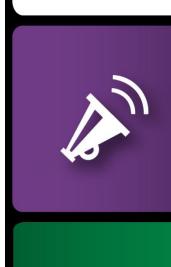
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Issue Brief #2:

Building SIF Subgrantee Capacity for Scale, Evidence, and Impact

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1.   Introduction

The Social Innovation Fund (SIF) leverages public and private resources to grow community solutions based on evidence of results. The National Assessment of the SIF seeks to document and capture the impact the SIF has on key program stakeholders. Findings from this multi-component independent assessment, conducted by ICF International,

> **Key Research Question:**
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> What kind of capacity building support do subgrantees receive as part of the SIF, and what makes capacity building efforts most effective?

will tell the story of the SIF and identify lessons learned. The SIF makes grants to experienced grant-making organizations, which identify promising programs within communities through an open and competitive process and distribute funds to high-performing nonprofit organizations that implement them, and match the federal funds dollar-for-dollar. SIF subgrantees also match the funding they receive dollar-for-dollar. All SIF-funded interventions undergo rigorous, independent evaluations to advance the base of evidence for the funded intervention.

This issue brief shares lessons about how the SIF builds capacity within its stakeholder organizations in order to strengthen them and enhance their impact. It provides action-oriented recommendations for current, incoming, and prospective SIF grantees, private and nonprofit organizations that might implement a SIF model, and policy makers. This brief is informed by insights from five SIF "Classic" [1] grantees, five subgrantees (one supported by each of the five grantees), and a partner engaged by one of the grantees to provide capacity building assistance to subgrantees.

Through the SIF, CNCS identifies promising programs with at least preliminary evidence of effectiveness, and provides grantees with tools, resources, skills, and knowledge to strengthen the programs further. Grantees, in turn, provide extensive capacity-building services to their subgrantees, and in many cases

> **Capacity Building with the SIF**
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> Capacity building includes providing tools, resources, skills, and knowledge to enhance the ways grantees and subgrantees engage in successful, evidence-based programs.

hire expert technical assistance providers to further augment subgrantee support. This capacity building took a variety of forms, and varied depending on factors such as the size of the grant, the project design, and the subgrantee's level of sophistication. Together, these multi-level and multi-layered capacity-building efforts help enhance SIF projects' effectiveness. With time, they may well help increase grantee and subgrantee capacity to implement non-SIF programs as well.

2.   CNCS Support for Grantees

SIF grantees are high-performing organizations—they can demonstrate at least preliminary evidence that their programs work, and they already have extensive capacity to support their subgrantees. To further augment that capacity and, ultimately, to strengthen the capacity of the subgrantees running evidence-based programs across the country, CNCS provides support to grantees by connecting them to one

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[1] The SIF has two grant programs: Classic and Pay for Success (PFS). The Classic program unites public and private resources to evaluate and grow innovative community-based solutions that have evidence of results in low-income communities. PFS is an innovative contracting and financing model that leverages philanthropic and private dollars to fund services up front, with the government, or other entity, paying after they generate results. CNCS funds capacity-building support for testing this model. As part of both the 2014 and 2015 Congressional appropriations, the SIF was given authority to use up to 20% of grant funds to implement a competition to test PFS approaches.

another; providing opportunities for grantees to share their strengths and learn from the strengths of others; and providing other types of supports. In a 2015 National Assessment survey, SIF grantees identified CNCS supports such as federal compliance training and assistance, evaluation planning support, networking opportunities, general support by the SIF program office, annual convenings, support from external contractors, and other outside training and resources as particularly helpful.

Grantees noted that CNCS's annual in-person SIF convenings helped them further develop key technical skills, internalize the SIF approach, become inspired with stories of what their colleagues do, and establish meaningful peer-to-peer relationships. Participants especially appreciated the opportunity to start their programs on the right foot with detailed compliance training, to gain insights on cutting edge topics such as effective storytelling, and to establish peer networking connections.

CNCS staff helped grantees expand their skills and knowledge between convenings in a variety of ways. They presented webinars on topics such as evaluation, subgrantee monitoring, and compliance with federal requirements. They hosted the SIF Knowledge Network, which houses tutorials, tools, checklists, and other CNCS-developed resources, and gave grantees the opportunity to share their own experiences, tools, and resources online. They provided resources and logistical support for SIF grantee workgroups, in which grantees engage in discussions with their peers around the SIF priority areas and issues related to evidence and evaluation. And they supported the SIF Knowledge Initiative to document and share best practices related to the grantees' programs.

The diverse array of supports CNCS provides to continuously improve grantee capacity is part of a tiered capacity-building strategy, intended to build grantee capacity, in order to ensure even stronger support for subgrantees and their programs over time. Grantees noted that Program Officers – proactive partners, who engage deeply with their grantees – and other knowledgeable CNCS technical staff were instrumental in providing timely support, guidance, and answers to questions.

> *"…as early as it begins, start thinking about the end, because you want to ensure that you use the time period that you're in the SIF to really build the critical capacity, that you do it swiftly, that you don't waste the opportunity to be in the SIF and to learn from your grantee, and to use the financial resources thoughtfully, and benefit from all the source of technical assistance that might be there…Then also, be thoughtful about the fact that it is about capacity-building for a period time, and…being thoughtful from the beginning, about how you will sustain it."*
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> *--Tiffany Cooper Gueye, SIF Subgrantee, BELL*

3.   Grantee Support for Subgrantees

SIF grantees provide capacity building support to their subgrantees on a variety of topics, including federal compliance and grant management, business planning, scaling, evidence, sustainability, evaluation, data collection, storytelling and communication, workflow and processes, and monitoring. Results of the 2015 National Assessment survey showed that SIF grantees have grown considerably in their ability to provide capacity building support over the course of their SIF grants, and indicate that they provide more subgrantee support than other nonprofits. For example, they were more likely to provide training or technical assistance to help subgrantees conduct rigorous evaluation or to support effective program implementation, and to provide funding to conduct effective evaluations or to hire an external evaluator. Grantees made their support effective by being transparent with subgrantees about needs and expectations, offering multi-stage experiential learning opportunities, providing tailored support, engaging in data-focused capacity building, creating and supporting peer learning, and building subgrantee capacity to build capacity.

3.1 Transparency about Needs and Expectations

To reach maximum effectiveness, capacity building requires transparency between funders and program implementation staff. Without it, subgrantees may fail to communicate their needs to the SIF grantees that fund their programs, and SIF grantees may fail to make their capacity building plans and expectations clear.

> *"Communication is huge. Flexibility within certain parameters is huge…Listening to your subgrantees and being open to feedback. Just that approach to being supportive to saying we're in this together and these are the goals that we're trying to accomplish. What do you need to do that? How can we help you?"*
>
> *--Emily Higgins, SIF Subgrantee, Champlain Housing Trust*

Subgrantees sometimes try to "put their best foot forward" so as not to raise funder concerns and risk losing their grants. Other times, subgrantees might believe that capacity building is reserved for "struggling programs," or they may lack insight into their own capacity building needs. To overcome these barriers, grantees worked to foster open relationships and partner with their subgrantees by initiating frequent communication, encouraging candid conversation about roadblocks, reacting to stated challenges as a supporter and problem solver, functioning as a thought partner, and actively working to identify ways capacity building efforts might enhance performance – even for high-performing subgrantees.

The Champlain Housing Trust was one subgrantee that appreciated having confidence that it could communicate openly with its grantor, Capital Impact Partners, without fear of negative consequences. The subgrantee attributed this positive dynamic to its portfolio manager's ability to listen well, respond with problem-solving ideas rather than blame, and adjust based on subgrantee feedback. As a SIF grantee, the John A. Hartford Foundation tackled the issue of subgrantee trust and confidence by engaging the Advancing Integrated Mental Health Solutions (AIMS) Center at the University of Washington (AIMS Center), a technical assistance provider, to help subgrantees identify needs and to provide technical support, training, coaching, and assistance. By creating a confidential relationship between the technical assistance provider and the subgrantee, the John A. Hartford Foundation fostered an environment where fear of losing funding would not interfere with honest communication about needs.

Bright Idea!

The Edna McConnell Clark Foundation (EMCF) engaged business planning partner, The Bridgespan Group, to develop organizational 'road maps' to guide subgrantees as they planned their SIF investments and grew their programs. Bridgespan and EMCF found the key time for developing a road map was after subgrantee selection but before EMCF had specified the investment amount. The road map included scenario plans for staffing, market analysis, and sustainability. The act of developing the plans helped subgrantees look at their intended accomplishments, identify whether more in-depth business planning was required, and consider at what point additional planning should take place.

Greater Twin Cities United Way pointed out that transparency needs to be a two-way street: SIF grantees need to make clear from the outset what capacity building activities their subgrantees will be strongly encouraged to engage in. They also noted that this is harder than it sounds. Greater Twin Cities told subgrantees early-on that all were encouraged to participate in capacity building opportunities regardless of their experience level or whether they experienced problems. But the idea of continuous capacity building for even high-performing subgrantees did not seem to 'click' until interactive group sessions around some challenging topics uncovered areas for growth among subgrantees at all levels, setting the stage for more experienced and high-functioning grantees to seek further capacity building opportunities.

Recommendations for Being Transparent about Needs and Expectations:

- Establish an open environment where subgrantees feel safe communicating their challenges, and where grantees and subgrantees exchange constructive feedback in both directions.

- Act as a thought partner and problem solver, cooperating with subgrantees to provide the support they need without micromanaging.

- Communicate to subgrantees that they are all strongly encouraged to engage in capacity building, find opportunities to uncover areas for growth, and work toward continuous improvement – even among the highest-performing subgrantees.

3.2 Multi-Stage Experiential Learning Opportunities

Grantees used a wide range of multi-stage experiential learning approaches, all aimed at helping subgrantees master and apply new concepts through iterative steps that gradually deepen and solidify learning. Many grantees offered a succession of activities in which each activity was built on the knowledge and experience gained in the previous activities. Activities included homework assignments to immerse in a topic; in-person or virtual presentations by subject matter experts; interactive convenings to discuss and solidify baseline knowledge; in-person working groups to allow for further engagement with peers or TA providers on a topic; opportunities for subgrantees to implement new strategies; follow-up discussions to share and learn from experiences; and exercises that guided subgrantees through developing strategies based on knowledge gained. When it came to developing tools and resources, grantees surveyed subgrantees about their capacity-building needs on a given topic, prepared resources based on the results; shared resources at in-person trainings; and provided one-on-one guidance during implementation of the tools.

> *"Taking a lot of the input and tools that the peers were sharing on that call, I started to think about what would be the right timing to introduce this subject with the sub-grantees. What kind of support or materials would I want to bring to a convening? Then how would we coordinate or facilitate either a training or informal sharing opportunity for the subgrantees to start thinking about their own strategy for sharing findings? Not just sharing findings, but actually improving programming based on those findings."*
>
> *--Naomi Zuk-Fisher, SIF Grantee, Greater Twin Cities United Way*

Capital Impact Partners (CIP) made financial management training for subgrantees very concrete by first asking subgrantees to provide information about revenue and expenses. Subgrantee staff then had the opportunity to meet one-on-one with a technical assistance provider to delve deeper into their own organization's financial information. With a clear understanding of their own organization's financial fundamentals, subgrantees were able to participate more fully in a group training session related to sustainability. CIP subgrantee The Champlain Housing Trust reported that layering these experiential learning opportunities helped reinforce key messages and solidify new skills.

Grantees found that subgrantees retained knowledge best when capacity building was timed to correspond with their need to apply the information, and focused on topics of immediate interest. Some grantees planned out the timing and content of their capacity building activities very early in the program. But grantees also recognized the need to adjust and adapt to circumstances over time. Three examples help illustrate the diverse ways this can be accomplished.

- The John A. Hartford Foundation's technical assistance provider organized capacity building around pre-established stages, based on the knowledge and skills subgrantees were expected to

need at various points in their programs. Pre-launch, subgrantees attended an in-person skills building session to learn about the model they were to implement; launch activities during the early months of the program involved key staff in weekly skill-building sessions drawing on their implementation experiences; and later in the project, after subgrantees had time to gather information about costs and revenue streams, post-launch activities focused on long-term financial sustainability planning.

- Rather than coming to the program with pre-established stages, Capital Impact Partners (CIP) conducted a comprehensive assessment of subgrantee practices prior to making SIF subgrant awards and developed a technical assistance work plan to address identified needs. CIP ran into challenges, though, when some subgrantees' organizational priorities did not align with the results of the assessment. CIP worked collaboratively with the subgrantees to incorporate subgrantees' input, and offer "just-in-time" delivery of knowledge and skills to meet the immediate needs agreed upon by CIP and the subgrantees.

- Greater Twin Cities United Way, in contrast, prioritized targeted responses to identified needs. For example, when a peer-to-peer subgrantee exchange identified the need for skills in the area of communicating evaluation findings, Greater Twin Cities drew on several resources to rapidly develop an approach for meeting the newly-identified need. They connected with fellow SIF grantee the GreenLight Fund to gather their insights; received tips from the GreenLight Fund's evaluation TA provider about useful materials and topics of discussion for developing training; drew inspiration and knowledge from materials available on the CNCS Knowledge Network; and obtained guidance from a technical assistance provider, providing timely support to their subgrantees on a topic the subgrantees were eager to hear about and use.

The Community Health Center of Central Wyoming (CHCCW) emphasized one key reason that multi-stage capacity building is important: at the outset, subgrantees may not know what they do not know. It took subgrantee CHCCW multiple interactions with The John A. Hartford Foundation and its technical assistance provider to understand how different the SIF model was from CHCCW's traditional service delivery method. CHCCW first had to learn from experience that they needed to build new skills; only then was the team ready to move on to getting capacity building support.

> *"…the lesson we learned from The John A. Hartford Foundation and this experience is that they are providing this fantastic road map. All we have to do is plug it in. There's some culture changes, but they've built this system many times over and it worked."*
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> *--Ryan Bair, SIF Subgrantee, Community Health Center of Central Wyoming*

Recommendations for Offering Multi-Stage Experiential Learning:

- Reinforce key ideas by pairing opportunities to receive content with opportunities for experiential learning.

- Use multiple formats and approaches to suit learners with different learning styles and preferences (e.g., "homework," webinars and phone calls, in-person working groups, peer learning, interactive trainings, one-on-one mentoring, and opportunities for real-world implementation).

- Offer capacity building that is relevant to the activities subgrantees are engaged in, at a point where they have the context and framework needed to understand and apply what they learn.

- Plan capacity building at the outset of the grant based on anticipated subgrantee needs, but adapt as needed to allow for "just-in-time" delivery of knowledge and skills to address needs that arise.

3.3 Tailored Support

Grantees found that general training, resources, and tools have their place in the spectrum of capacity building activities, but learned that finding ways to provide tailored support was essential for maximum impact. This held true in both group and individual settings.

Although tailored support was particularly challenging in the context of group activities, grantees found that techniques such as individualized role plays, opportunities for participants to practice applying what they learned to their own situations, and peer-to-peer learning opportunities that focused on addressing individual subgrantee challenges could all be effective. These approaches provided the double bonus of discovering tailored solutions to individual issues, while simultaneously allowing for peer learning and building supportive peer communities.

Alternating group and individual support was another popular approach to tailoring subgrantee learning experiences. The Mayor's Fund, for example, demonstrated the value of combining group information sharing with tailored support through its dissemination of a financial tracking tool. The tool was initially shared with all grantees to provide an efficient mechanism to facilitate financial tracking and reporting. But once the tool was disseminated, The Mayor's Fund met individually with subgrantees to ensure they understood how and why to use the tool, knew how it fit with their internal tracking systems, and answered questions about how to use the tool efficiently in their individual situations. After individual follow-up was complete, the Mayor's Fund assessed trends, reported them back to the group, and encouraged subgrantees to discuss their challenges with one another and provide peer-to-peer technical assistance.

> "[The grantee program officer] actually asks questions that help us think about ways we can do our work better. I think that, in itself, is capacity building, because framing questions right is much better than getting a lot of free advice that doesn't necessarily fit with where a subgrantee would be."
>
> --Karen Woodward, SIF Subgrantee, Saint Paul Public Schools Foundation

Capital Impact Partners (CIP) sought a hybrid approach by combining some full-group activities with more targeted subgroups. In preparation for a subgroup session on workflow management, CIP convened all subgrantees through a webinar to assess and learn about subgrantees' use of paper or online home purchase applications. During the working group, select participants mapped their workflows, presented them to the group, received feedback from peers, and worked with a technical assistance provider to improve their workflows and develop online application forms. CIP used the learnings from the working group and the information about which subgrantees used each type of application to offer separate follow-up activities for groups that were already using online applications and groups interested in implementing online applications.

At the individual level, several subgrantees spoke glowingly of the support they received from portfolio managers or technical assistance providers who knew their programs well and therefore could dig deep and ask penetrating questions. Subgrantees that experienced this 'Socratic Method' of providing individual support noted how helpful it was – not only for solving immediate problems, but also for developing the skills needed to ask the same types of insightful questions of themselves the next time. Subgrantee BELL, for example, noted that a general tool to help develop a communication framework might have been helpful but could not have had nearly the value of their portfolio manager's insightful,

probing questions. Grantee portfolio managers also recognized the importance of asking questions, and viewed themselves as bringing value to the process through their roles as sounding boards, helping subgrantees think through strategic issues, seek solutions to stumbling blocks, and decide when to call in experts for help. Grantee portfolio managers also mentioned a potential pitfall here: asking questions in a 'gotcha' frame of mind will quickly shut down a subgrantee's willingness to engage in constructive discussion. This means that top-notch capacity building requires both asking probing analytic questions, and supporting a problem-solving process, without criticism or blame.

Recommendations for Providing Tailored Support:

- Find ways to tailor group capacity building activities, e.g., by incorporating individualized role plays, opportunities to apply what was learned to individual situations, and peer-to-peer learning opportunities that focus on addressing individual challenges.

- Group subgrantees by level of experience to provide more tailored capacity building opportunities.

- Ask probing questions to help subgrantees refine the way they apply critical thinking skills to their work.

- Create a problem-solving environment that consciously avoids engaging in criticism or blame.

3.4 Data-Focused Capacity Building

The SIF emphasizes supporting what works, so it is no surprise that grantees and their technical assistance providers focused on helping subgrantees use data to enhance their programs by establishing appropriate metrics, collecting data efficiently, analyzing it effectively, and adapting programs accordingly. Capacity building strategies included establishing regular reporting mechanisms to consistently collect needed data, and building subgrantees' ability to translate the data into actionable steps to improve their programs.

> *"Well, it was kind of the feeling of being on the same boat. I think that was always very helpful in understanding that other clinics have similar problems and similar successes. Learning from each other, I think that was very helpful."*
>
> *--Alicja Iznerowicz, SIF Subgrantee, Community Health Center of Central Wyoming*

Subgrantee Per Scholas, for example, had a well-established job placement program in place before participating in the SIF. However, The Mayor's Fund helped build Per Scholas' capacity to think more holistically about long-term outcomes, identify new metrics to gauge long-term program success more meaningfully, establish more effective data reporting systems, and structure reporting to focus on key metrics. Through this process, Per Scholas identified career advancement as an important longer-term goal, identified wage increases after job placement as an appropriate metric, and incorporated this metric into a new career advancement tracking system. Focusing on the data led Per Scholas to a significant adjustment to its program structure: adding career coaches to help clients continue their growth trajectory after graduation.

The John A. Hartford Foundation's technical assistance provider used a data-supported approach to build subgrantees' ability to use data to identify program improvements. They analyzed data from an online management registry and presented findings to the subgrantees, including The Community Health Center of Central Wyoming (CHCCW), on a monthly basis. This ongoing analysis process built subgrantee capacity to use data to identify problems, develop hypotheses about causes, and generate

solutions – allowing CHCCW to educate its staff and adjust its internal processes in real time to continuously improve performance on key metrics. The technical assistance provider gradually began asking subgrantees to do the analysis and lead the discussion, based on the process that had been modeled. CHCCW reports that the process was so valuable that it intends to apply its new skills to improve systems of care for its non-SIF programs.

Recommendations for Engaging in Data-Focused Capacity Building:

- Build a 'data culture' by demonstrating how data can provide the foundation for program planning and improvement.

- Provide the skills needed to set up data metrics, interpret data, use results to make programmatic changes, and encourage thinking about how the new insights can be applied to programs outside of the SIF.

3.5 Creating and Supporting Peer Learning

When grantees found subgrantees grappling with similar challenges, they often arranged for formal peer learning opportunities through in-person convenings, webinars, or conference calls to rapidly build capacity across the cohort. Grantees whose subgrantees implemented a single program model had a great deal of common ground to work with. For example, The John A. Hartford Foundation's technical assistance provider worked intensively with the foundation's subgrantees, all of which were implementing the same integrated mental health clinical model, to cultivate peer learning opportunities in a group setting.

> **Spotlight On: Relationship Building**
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> Several grantees mentioned the importance of helping subgrantees develop relationships that would support their work in the longer term as key to their capacity building strategies.
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> - **Peers**. Grantees recognized the importance of helping subgrantees develop supportive relationships with their peers, and found creative ways to create these dynamics. For example, Capital Impact Partners hosted a "fail fest" where subgrantees told stories of struggles and shared solutions, building a culture of sharing and trust.
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> - **Funders**. Grantees also focused on helping subgrantees develop relationships to help ensure sustainability after the SIF. The Mayor's Fund, for example, replicated their program in cities where they had local contacts. This allowed them to convene meetings and encourage new relationships between subgrantees and potential new funders.

This effort included regular sessions in which subgrantees described challenging cases they were confronting, and engaged in role playing exercises with their colleagues. Subgrantee Community Health Center of Central Wyoming (CHCCW) highlighted the value of these peer learning sessions, and noted that they intend to continue peer learning even after their participation in the SIF ends.

Even when subgrantee program models differed, however, grantees were able to identify common challenges around topics such as compliance with federal regulations and organizational management. The Edna McConnell Clark Foundation (EMCF), for example, worked with subgrantees who were

> **Bright Idea!**
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> The Mayor's Fund used learnings from the SIF and other partners to offer a professional development course in partnership with the City University of New York (CUNY). The curriculum's seven competencies included data management, staff management, communications, and partnership development. The program is a forum for Mayor's Fund subgrantees and other Mayor's Fund programs to learn from each other, enhance their leadership skills, be intentional about the skills they need to develop their programs, and continue to improve in those areas. Through course participation, a staff member from subgrantee Per Scholas engaged in ongoing and meaningful discussions of effective models and shared solutions with peers engaged in similar work.

implementing a variety of youth development and education programs. EMCF observed common subgrantee needs around topics such as establishing effective management structures, expanding programs, reporting, fundraising, and compliance with federal requirements. EMCF used one-on-one and group training approaches, but also emphasized bringing subgrantees together for in-person convenings or conference calls that drew on peers to share best practices, proven or promising methods, and solutions to common challenges.

> *"…the advice I'd give to myself if I were doing this again would be…really taking the opportunities to get to know the other sub-grantees who are working with the intermediary from day one and putting egos aside and [saying] here's what's really going wrong over here and let's figure it out together."*
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> *--Kelly Richardson, SIF Subgrantee, Per Scholas*

Grantees also found opportunities to pair individual subgrantees with peer organizations facing similar challenges. For example, Capital Impact Partners' technical assistance provider connected Champlain Housing Trust in Vermont with another subgrantee in Seattle to discuss challenges and share insights about implementing effective policies for meeting the foreign language interpretation needs of its customers. Once connected, subgrantees can establish and sustain their own peer support networks. The project director for subgrantee Per Scholas, for example, connected with a colleague in another state who was managing a similar type of program. She found great value in sharing ideas through informal emails and phone conversations, without any formal grantee involvement.

> *"The type of work that we're funding actually breaks down silos. It's revolutionary in many respects, and really forces organizations to enhance internal dialogue, internal communications and create very rigorous processes that cut across the disciplines…"*
>
> *--Wally Patawaran, SIF Grantee, The John A. Hartford Foundation*

The Saint Paul Public Schools Foundation (SPPSF) also initiated peer learning by visiting a sister subgrantee organization. During the visit, they discussed common approaches used and impacts achieved among the students they work with. SPPSF then reported these shared learning experiences to the grantee, Greater Twin Cities United Way, which in turn brought key topics of discussion to a convening of all Greater Twin Cities subgrantees. Similarly, when one of the newly selected subgrantees of The John A. Hartford Foundation, a clinic located in Butte, Montana, learned that it was to receive SIF funding, staff traveled 100 miles to see firsthand how the program was being implemented in Missoula. In addition to sharing insights into how the program operated, the two clinics discovered another way to collaborate: they began sharing the services of a psychiatric consultant, a critically important role for each organization. Because the consultant was already familiar with the model from her work in Missoula, she brought significant expertise to the new Butte program.

Peer-to-peer learning often relies on seasoned subgrantees to serve as resources for newer subgrantees. This can be one of the most effective capacity building mechanisms for new subgrantees, who benefit greatly from hearing from those who have on-the-ground experience. Seasoned subgrantees noted that this must be balanced with the need to provide skill-building opportunities for those grantees with more expertise so that all subgrantees are continuously improving their programs.

Recommendations for Creating and Supporting Peer Learning:

- Provide opportunities for subgrantees to convene and share best practices, proven or promising methods, and solutions to common challenges.

- Connect subgrantees that share similar program designs or challenges, and encourage them to form on-going support networks.

- Provide opportunities to build community by sharing struggles, as well as successes.

3.6 Building the Capacity to Build Capacity

With regard to long-term capacity development, grantees and subgrantees noted the importance of planning for peer-to-peer learning within their own organizations to ensure that they will be able to pass learning on to their 'next generation' staff. This meant that capacity building efforts needed to go beyond skill transfer to current staff in particular roles; they also needed to focus on how current staff will identify back-up staff and successors, and teach those staff the new skills.

> *"…see one, do one, teach one…So we did the "see one." Now they're "doing." And they'll have that internal capacity and be able to "teach" other people at their organization, and hopefully, at other organizations, if they wanted to.*
>
> *--Diane Powers, Technical Assistance Provider, AIMS Center, University of Washington*

Choosing the right staff for receiving the initial capacity building support was key to extending knowledge beyond the individual staff who received it and institutionalizing that knowledge across the organization. For example, The Mayor's Fund's technical assistance provider offered a webinar series about using motivational interviewing to evaluate a program. The training addressed not only the required skills, but also ways to pass the new knowledge on to colleagues who did not participate in the webinar. Subgrantee Per Scholas noted a similar process, in which a single staff member was originally trained in a new approach to supporting clients through multiple career development stages. When the approach proved successful, that staff member trained the rest of the team's career development staff to function as career coaches. Per Scholas is now thinking ahead, to how new staff will acquire these same

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Spotlight On: Building the Capacity to Share Lessons with the World

Because SIF programs will have greater long-term effect if their results, contributions, and lessons learned are shared, the SIF has focused on building grantee and subgrantee capacity to share their stories with the world.

The importance of communicating results effectively became clear to **Capital Impact Partners (CIP)** as the result of a SIF convening workshop about effective messaging. After the workshop, CIP staff first worked to build its Communications and Program staff's understanding of how to tell their SIF story with data. CIP then worked with a consultant to transfer this concept to its subgrantees through storytelling training. CIP subgrantees have applied their new storytelling skills through blog posts; improved websites; and clearer explanations of their work, who it impacts, and why stakeholders should support them. Subgrantee **Champlain Housing Trust** also found the storytelling training inspiring. Since the training, Champlain has focused on featuring real people and their stories in its publications. It also has used storytelling concepts to help the team develop a concise "elevator speech" to effectively share its foundational message.

The **Edna McConnell Clark Foundation (EMCF)** and strategic evaluation partner MDRC recognized the importance of strong messaging to advance adoption of the evidence-based strategies demonstrated by its SIF programs. Long before any research results were obtained, EMCF and MDRC put communications protocols in place, and as each SIF program's research work wrapped up, helped subgrantees develop strategies for effectively communicating their results – positive, negative, or mixed. Subgrantee **BELL** reported that the first communications step began early – with developing an organized, accurate, and accessible evaluation report. EMCF helped BELL engage a communications firm to train BELL's staff to effectively tell their program's story, share key learnings, and respond to questions after the findings were released. BELL found this training instrumental in enhancing staff ability to communicate effectively with funders, other service providers, and stakeholders about BELL's results and what it is learning from its work.

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skills. SIF grantees and subgrantees also pointed out the importance of having staff throughout the organization come to understand the SIF model, and how various parts of the organization contribute to the program's success. To do this, grantees suggested that staff must share information about what they do and how they do it with staff in other parts of the organization to break down silos and ensure a strong organization-wide understanding of the program and how each part of the organization can help achieve it.

Recommendations for Building the Capacity to Build Capacity:

- Emphasize the importance of transferring skills to others and provide strategies to do it well.

- Encourage staff to think broadly across the organization, recognizing silos and initiating information-sharing to break them down.

4.   About This Issue Brief

This issue brief was informed by input from the following people from SIF Classic recipient organizations and their subgrantees:

- Teresa Power, Courtney O'Malley, and William Moon, Edna McConnell Clark Foundation (2010 SIF grantee) and Tiffany Cooper Gueye from subgrantee BELL (Building Educated Leaders for Life)

- Sinead Keegan and Brigit Beyea, Mayor's Fund to Advance New York City/Center for Economic Opportunity (2010 SIF grantee) and Kelly Richardson, Linda Lopez, and Calinda Lewis, from subgrantee Per Scholas;

- Jenee Kresge-Gaynor, Capital Impact Partners (2011 SIF grantee) and Emily Higgins and Kim Moran from subgrantee Champlain Housing Trust;

- Naomi Zuk-Fisher and Elise Wiener, Greater Twin Cities United Way (2012 SIF grantee) and Karen Woodward from subgrantee Saint Paul Public Schools Foundation; and

- Wally Patawaran, The John A. Hartford Foundation (2012 SIF grantee), Ryan Bair and Alicja Iznerowicz from subgrantee Community Health Center of Central Wyoming; and Diane Powers, from The John A. Hartford Foundation technical assistance provider the University of Washington AIMS Center.

5.   About The Social Innovation Fund

The Social Innovation Fund, an initiative of the Corporation for National and Community Service (CNCS) under the Edward M. Kennedy Serve America Act, is a new approach by the federal government to address urgent national challenges. The fund mobilizes public and private resources to grow the impact of promising, innovative community-based solutions that have evidence of compelling results in three areas of priority need: economic opportunity, healthy futures, and youth development.

The operating model of the SIF is distinguished by the following six elements:

Innovation │ Evidence │ Scale │ Grantmakers │ Match │ Knowledge Sharing

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