Leadership Development and Training: A New Role for Intermediaries?

I. Introduction

Could community economic development (CED) intermediaries play a bigger role in the education and training of CED leadership? Should intermediaries play a bigger role? What type of role should they play? This paper will explore these questions and try to provide some insight on the future of CED training.

The modern CED movement is facing perhaps its most challenging test in weathering the most severe financial downturn since the Great Depression. The harsh new environment that CED organizations find themselves in has prompted some soul-searching within the movement on how the movement as a whole can be made more sustainable and resilient.[1] One of the most important components of a sustainable community development movement is a steady foundation of high-quality leadership, particularly considering the concern that the existing leadership of the CED movement is greying. The obvious question that follows is how to cultivate that "new blood" for CEDs.

Unsurprisingly, the problem of educating and developing CED leadership has been around almost as long as the CED movement itself. Over the movement's roughly 50-year lifespan, a variety of academic programs, government training programs, and non-profit training organizations have combined to form a basic education apparatus. Nevertheless, the training apparatus as a whole remains fragmented, inconsistent, poorly defined, poorly funded, and lacking in long-term educational programs (as opposed to one-off, short-term programs aimed at more specific and generally more technical skills). To be sure, technical training serves an important function and should not be neglected, but more generalized professional training will help produce adaptable and resilient leaders ready for the new challenges facing CEDs in the Twenty-First century.

Going into the future, CED intermediaries present a potentially vital source of talent and leadership development programs. Traditionally, the standard intermediary has functioned as a financing and information coordinator for various other organizations. However, there are many features typically associated with CED intermediaries that may make them the ideal educator for the new generation of CED leaders: relatively greater access to funding sources, the ability to exploit economies of scale, contact with a wide variety of partner organizations, and relatively greater organizational capacity. These days it is not uncommon to find intermediaries that have some training functions, but these are generally tangential to their primary functions. Intermediaries that focus on training or have a well-developed training regime paired with their central mission are much harder to find.

This paper aims to explore the role that intermediaries could potentially play in developing CED leadership and what the contours of that role should be. Part II will provide a brief history of the CED training framework as it has developed over the lifespan of the CED movement. Part III will examine several training intermediary models. Part IV will look at some complicating issues and examine the alternative of university training. Part V will offer some concluding thoughts.

II. A history of CED training

In developing a roadmap for the future of CED training, it is useful to examine how the field has developed and what has worked

in the past. CED training history can be generally broken down into three "waves," and it is arguable that we are entering or already have entered into a fourth wave with the advent of the Great Recession. The first wave, which consists of a roughly ten-year period starting from the mid-1960s through the late-1970s, coincided with the birth of the CED movement; thus, like the early CED movement itself, much of the training was driven by government programs and government funding.[2] Many of the initial CED movement leaders were trained informally through Great Society programs.[3] Additionally, a group of roughly 50 CED organizations received significant federal funding through the Economic Opportunity Act of 1966, which allowed them to retain professional development staffs.[4] Moreover, the federal government established the National Training Institute for Community Economic Development, which focused mainly on training boards of directors for various community development corporations (CDCs).[5] However, there were some non-governmental training programs that also formed during this period, the most notable being the Pratt Institute, a well-regarded program that still exists to this day.[6]

The expansion of the CED model in the 1980s beyond several core areas of high poverty, necessitating more numerous and formal training programs, marked the beginning of the second wave. The federal government still played an important role. For example, the Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) launched an information and training campaign in the early 80s that was instrumental in starting many prominent modern day CED organizations.[7] However, on the whole, government support for training and CED in general began dwindling during this era.[8] To fill the gap, a mix of various organizations and universities stepped up and began to provide training services.[9] This is the era in which the Development Training Institute (DTI) and other prominent national training intermediaries came into existence, as well as some of the more well-recognized university programs (*e.g.* New Hampshire College & Southern New Hampshire University).

The third wave began in the late 1980s and continued through the 1990s. It was generally marked by even greater proliferation and specialization of training programs. The most prominent training organizations of the second wave began to work with other organizations to develop more localized training programs.[10] Higher education also took a more prominent role as colleges around the nation began offering programs with a component of CED or an actual CED-centered program; close to 200 such programs existed by the tail end of the third wave.[11] More mature organizations also began to provide specialized programs that were tailored to address specific and oftentimes more technical issues. For example, the Association for Neighborhood and Housing Development, a coalition of over 80 New York CEDs, created a program specifically for apartment management.[12]

The development of CED training thus far contains several important lessons. First, CED training mechanisms have always adapted to the contemporary needs of the CED community; thus, flexibility and adaptability are important virtues of a training initiative. Second, history also indicates that at this point in time it would probably be unrealistic to expect the federal government to get too involved with active training programs. Finally, the trend in CED training has generally been toward a greater number of specialized university and non-profit training programs, but it is unclear what effects the economic environment will have on future development.

III. Existing training intermediary models

There are a myriad of training intermediaries around the nation. For instance, the state of New Jersey has at least three to four organizations that could be classified as intermediaries and offer some sort of educational program for local groups.[13] Nevertheless, the general consensus seems to be that the educational needs of CED organizations nationwide are not being met.[14] Furthermore, mirroring the trajectory of CED in general, a significant number of programs emphasize housing and real estate topics.[15] There are few organizations that provide more comprehensive programs and even fewer that do so consistently and on a broad scale.

To keep itself to a manageable length, this paper will examine only two of the largest and most prominent examples of training intermediaries: The Center for Leadership Innovation (TCLI), formerly known as the Development Training Institute (DTI), and NeighborWorks Training Institute (NTI), also known as the Neighborhood Reinvestment Training Institute (NRTI). It is important to keep in mind that these are both national organizations, though it may be possible to replicate their approaches on a smaller scale. In a similar vein, it is also important to point out the tension between size, access, and quality, which will be discussed further in Part IV.

A. The Center for Leadership Innovation

As a result of its thirty-year history and its national scope, TCLI probably has the most well-developed training intermediary model currently in existence. Over its lifespan, TCLI has experimented with and combined training methods stemming from a variety of educational perspectives including organizational development, human resource development, adult education, cross-cultural training, and community organizing.[16] TCLI offers a large variety of programs. Among the subject areas covered are economic development, finance, board training, real estate, community building, planning, and more.[17] The programs range from one-day courses on particular topics to those that meet for more than twenty days over the course of eight months.[18] Some require traveling to Baltimore, where TCLI is located, while other programs are held at conferences in other cities.

TCLI has been successful because it has been able to obtain a relatively steady stream of funding from over 100 organizations.[19] Nevertheless, despite its success in developing a solid training model, TCLI still has some issues to resolve. The most important is that their oldest program, the eight month training in Baltimore, is very exclusive and restrictive in format. Though it has branched out to other cities through a variety of programs, TCLI could definitely improve access to its programs. For example, it could start a branch office in another city and replicate its main program there, though in reality, TCLI may not have the resources to do this.

B. Neighborhood Reinvestment Training Institute

Though the NRTI program has been around in some form or another since the 1970s, it has not quite reached TCLI's level because the greater NeighborWorks organization does not focus solely on education. In fact, most of its focus is directed toward the prototypical "bricks and mortar" model that has come to be associated with the CED movement.[20] Nevertheless, NRTI provides a well-

respected training program that allows a greater degree of access to CED professionals nationwide in comparison to TCLI. However, its programs are not as developed and immersive as those offered by TCLI.

The main training program is a series of intensive conferences held in different cities around the country, typically over the course of three to four days.[21] Students can earn certificates in eight broad categories including management and leadership, community building, CED, neighborhood revitalization, affordable housing, construction and production management, home ownership and community lending, and general studies in community development.[22] Each program of study requires specific courses and electives. Typically, a certificate can be earned within three or four training institute sessions. In addition, NRTI has a variety of peripheral programs, the most notable of which is a program that allows its partner organizations to request special training sessions for their local community.[23] It is also worth noting that NRTI also offers online courses.[24]

C. Lessons learned

These two models demonstrate the tension that training intermediaries face between access and quality/depth. Both examples also demonstrate the importance of a consistent stream of funding. In light of these competing concerns, an ideal solution would be a network of training organizations that are large enough to attract capital and develop quality programs, but local enough to provide reasonable access. Of course, this is easier said than done. One possible solution is to have a single diversified training intermediary for each state, which would bring together fractured resources, but also retain a relatively local character. This can be accomplished through a variety of methods: a coalition of non-profits in a given state, state government-sponsored initiatives, or, in states that already have a dominant intermediary organization, through efforts of those particular organizations.

IV. Complicating issues

A. Appropriate scope of programs

What is the proper scope of intermediary training programs if they are to be an effective training mechanism? There are several considerations to take into account including size, curriculum, availability of funding, etc. Of course, all of these issues are to some degree interrelated. Furthermore, regardless of the form that intermediary training takes, funding will probably be a limiting factor. In the current resource-strapped environment, many CED organizations already find it difficult to secure funding to accomplish their main missions; few will have the additional resources for human capital development either internally through their own programs or externally through other training programs. Thus, training intermediaries will generally have to rely on private donors or government funds, which are scarce and may be difficult to direct toward programs that have no direct benefit to any constituency besides CED organizations.

1. Size and access concerns

One of the major issues regarding scope of an intermediary training model is the appropriate size of the programs. Should they be concentrated at the nation, state, county, or community level? At first glance, a patchwork of various training programs at a very local level may seem like a good idea because it would be highly attuned to the particular needs of local organizations and would allow access to more people. In some

respects, this is the system that presently exists aside from a handful of national training organizations. However, this approach creates severe fragmentation, which in turn leads to inefficient duplication of services, information asymmetries, and a general lack of transferability. Furthermore, there is the practical concern that it is highly doubtful that the average US community unit could sustain a multitude of training programs or even a single program.

On the other hand, even if highly localized programs are not the answer, it is difficult to say the proper level at which training intermediaries should be established to create the most impact. Though national level intermediaries such as TCLI have definitely helped to advance the field, relying on large national organizations will severely limit access to the members of only the largest and most well-funded nonprofits. For example, large training intermediaries often set organizational requirements that prospective students must meet in order to participate in their programs. Furthermore, some more practical limitations to national training programs include requiring prospective students to travel to another city for an extended period of time or offering less familiarity with the environment in which a particular student works.

Of course, a national model, a local model, and anything in between are all very nebulous categories that can probably coexist. Indeed, a combination of different models may be the best option for an effective, but sustainable intermediary training model. For example, one potential solution to the size issue can be found in a practice that is currently used by some state-level organizations. In North Carolina, the North Carolina Community Development Initiative (NCCDI) has partnered with TCLI (DTI) to create a comprehensive training program consisting of a variety of leadership-development classes taken over the course of several months. The curriculum and methodology are based off TCLI's model, but NCCDI is responsible for the administration of the program. This program essentially splits the costs of providing education by taking advantage of the benefits associated with both national and sub-national programs. However, these training programs are not conducted on a regular basis and access is typically limited to organizations with which NCCDI has worked in the past. Both of these features probably exist because of insufficient resources. Thus, while this approach may be a step in the right direction, there is definitely a ways to go before it can be a sustainable model.

2. Standards and curriculum

Another important issue to consider is the appropriate curriculum that training intermediaries should seek to implement. These concerns are closely related to the problems associated with size and the question of whether intermediaries should even be the primary training mechanism for CED organizations. However, different training programs will have different competency levels, objectives, strengths, weaknesses, and overall focus; thus, a "best practice" curriculum is very difficult to define. However, some curriculum standardization has to occur, particularly as it relates to the more universal skills applicable in the CED context. A greater degree of standardization will not only improve the substance of training programs, but will also serve a quality assurance function both for prospective CED students and for the organizations that utilize program graduates. Finally, a set of training standards and more tangible data on outcomes could make it easier to convince potential donors of any given program's efficacy and thereby obtain financing.

In order to produce a set of standardized practices, more and better data will be required on a variety of related topics. As an initial matter, existing programs must do a better job of tracking their students and graduates in order to determine the most effective training tools. In this manner, CED training as a whole can begin moving toward a general rubric of education through an accumulation of experience. As the CED training sector becomes more well-defined and coherent, perhaps various CED organizations or even the training intermediaries themselves can establish some sort of informal licensing system or an approval process.

The other major issue regarding appropriate curriculum is whether to focus on specialized topics or to provide more comprehensive training. The former often involves more technical skills while the latter is typically aimed at "soft" skills. Both types of training are important, but there is a general dearth of comprehensive programs available to the multitude of CED organizations. There is some research that finds correlation between participation in comprehensive training and success in the CED field.[25] It is unsurprising that programs currently offered by CED organizations and their intermediaries skew toward specialized training, as the nature of comprehensive training generally requires longer and more expensive programs that do not necessarily align with the particular goals or expertise of the organization providing the program. Thus, perhaps intermediaries would be better off focusing on more specialized/technical training instead of trying to provide a type of training that they are not particularly well-suited to provide.

B. Appropriateness of using intermediaries as primary training vehicles

Though this paper makes the case for intermediaries as educators, the issues identified previously indicate that it is still questionable whether they are the best avenue for developing the next generation of CED leaders. The most obvious alternative would be university training. Although there are very few university programs around the country that focus specifically on CED, there are many university programs, mostly post-graduate, that allow for specialization in community development or, at the very least, offer classes on the subject (primarily in business, law, or public policy schools).

The university training approach has several advantages in comparison to a primarily intermediary-based system. The main theoretical advantage is the ability to provide a richer, longer, more flexible, and more immersive education experience to interested parties. To the extent that there is enough interest and support within universities to sustain CED-focused programs, relying on universities to be the primary education vehicle also somewhat diminishes the constant worry of funding that would otherwise plague intermediary training organizations. Finally, a university training model would alleviate the curriculum/credentialing concerns mentioned previously, as the university "brand" would become the indicator of quality and organizations in the business of providing education should ostensibly be able to produce an effective curriculum.

However, university training also has its own disadvantages. As with any other field of study, classroom education does not always translate into results in the field. One study, comparing the results of academic and non-academic training programs, found that participants in nonacademic training programs were more successful in finding and staying in jobs at CDCs.[26] Additionally, there are the more practical concerns of access and availability. The time, financial

resources, and intellectual effort required to participate in a full-time academic program will limit the pool of students to those who are younger and more economically well-off. Furthermore, though the number of academic programs has generally trended upward over the lifespan of the CED movement, there are still many areas around the country that remain underserved.

Of course, university education and intermediary training are not mutually exclusive nor do they cover the entire range of options. The government has historically played a significant role in leadership development, and individual CED organizations will always have training programs for their own purposes. A partnership between universities and intermediaries could be extremely fruitful; it is easy to imagine a program where the comprehensive, leadership-building portion of the education occurs at universities and more practical skills are developed through a variety of hands-on training, internships, and apprenticeships provided by partnered CED intermediaries.

V. Conclusion

CED leadership training is a topic that will become increasingly important in a resource strapped environment because it is both a problem and a solution in the resource equation: resource constraints will undoubtedly affect the size, availability, and capacity of training programs, but proper training will also produce leaders who can thrive despite resource constraints. At the very least, people in the field should be aware of the issues involved and consider the implications that a different training paradigm would have on the CED movement. This paper has suggested focusing on intermediaries, but a comprehensive approach leveraging the resources of universities, federal/state/local governments, and intermediary partner organizations will be required to create a long-term training model that will support sustainable CED.

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[1] *See generally* ROLAND V. ANGLIN, PROMOTING SUSTAINABLE LOCAL AND COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT (2010).
[2] *See* JOSEPH MCNEELY, THE HISTORY AND FUTURE OF TRAINING AND EDUCATION FOR FAITH-BASED AND COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT 213-215 (2006).
[3] *Id*.
[4] *Id*.
[5] *Id*.
[6] *See* PRATT CENTER FOR COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT, http://prattcenter.net (last visited Mar. 20, 2013).
[7] MCNEELY, *supra* note 2, at 216.
[8] *Id*.
[9] *Id*. at 216-219.
[10] *Id*. at 219.
[11] *See* PAUL C. BROPHY & ALICE SHABECOFF, A GUIDE TO CAREERS IN COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT 2001.
[12] MCNEELY, *supra* note 2, at 221.
[13] STEPHEN P. FINN, INVENTORY OF COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT TRAINING PROGRAMS 3-69 (2002).
[14] MCNEELY, *supra* note 2, at 221.
[15] *See* FINN, *supra* note 13, at 73-91.
[16] *Id*. at 75.
[17] *Id*.
[18] *Id*.
[19] THE CENTER FOR LEADERSHIP INNOVATION, http://www.centerforleadershipinnovation.org/partners (last visited Mar. 20, 2013).
[20] *See* NeighborWorks America, http://www.nw.org/network/ (last visited Mar. 20 2013).
[21] *Id*.
[22] *Id*.
[23] *Id*.
[24] *Id*.

[25] DONALD KIRKPATRICK, EVALUATING TRAINING PROGRAMS: THE FOUR LEVELS 1998.

[26] Neil S. Mayer, *Education and Training for Community Development*, *in* BUILDING THE ORGANIZATIONS THAT BUILD COMMUNITIES: STRENGTHENING THE CAPACITY OF FAITH- AND COMMUNITY-BASED DEVELOPMENT ORGANIZATIONS (Roland V. Anglin ed., 2003).