Research Center for Leadership in Action
NYU Wagner

GRANTMAKERS FOR EFFECTIVE ORGANIZATIONS

Executive Summary

The Power of Learning:

How Learning Communities Amplify the Work of Nonprofits and Grantmakers

This executive summary is excerpted from an internal research report commissioned by Grantmakers for Effective Organizations and produced by NYU Wagner's Research Center for Leadership in Action in 2012.

For further information or to request a full copy of the report, please contact Leonor Alfonso at alfonso@geofunders.org

Grantmakers for Effective Organizations (GEO) is currently undertaking a multi-year initiative, Scaling What Works, to support the success of the Social Innovation Fund and "to expand the number of grantmakers and public sector funders across the country that are prepared to broaden the impact of high-performing nonprofits." As part of this effort, GEO is interested in gaining a deeper understanding of "learning communities," especially how grantmakers can employ them to support collective learning among their grantees.

GEO selected the Research Center for Leadership in Action (RCLA) at New York University's Robert F. Wagner Graduate School of Public Service to conduct a study on learning communities (LCs). The study addresses questions about different types of LCs, their design elements, the common challenges they face and their role in helping scale effective practices as well how they define success and common elements of success in facilitating learning to change practice.

About Grantmakers for Effective Organizations

Understanding that grantmakers are successful only to the extent that their grantees achieve meaningful results, GEO promotes strategies and practices that contribute to grantee success. In 1997, a handful of visionary leaders saw a need for a place where grantmakers committed to improving organizational effectiveness could convene to share knowledge and best practices, and inspire their colleagues to act. Today, GEO is a powerful coalition of more than 2,700 individual members representing 360 grantmaking organizations committed to building strong and effective nonprofit organizations. GEO helps grantmakers improve practices in areas which, through years of work in philanthropy, have been identified by innovators in the field as critical to nonprofit success.

About the Research Center for Leadership in Action at NYU Wagner

RCLA is a research center founded at NYU Wagner in 2003 with support from the Ford Foundation. As the hub for leadership research and practice at NYU, RCLA faculty teaches courses at the undergraduate, masters and executive masters levels. In addition, RCLA works across the diverse domains of public service to build knowledge and capacity for leadership that transforms society. The Center's greatest asset is its unique ability to partner with leaders to create collaborative learning environments, translate ideas into action and build knowledge from the ground up. As a result, RCLA contributes breakthrough ideas to the worlds of scholarship and practice. The Center does this work with the conviction that today's pressing social problems require moving beyond the traditional image of a heroic leader to facilitating leadership in which people work across sectors and boundaries to find common solutions.

Understanding Learning Communities: Theoretical Foundations and Definitions

The learning community (LC) construct is grounded in a social theory of learning that emerged in the early 1990s, when learning began to be understood as a social process mediated by relationships, not just a cognitive act in an individual's mind (Lave and Wenger, 1991).[1] According to this view, participants in an LC not only learn from each other, but learn how to behave as members of the community, including how to exchange knowledge, acquire skills and change their practice. This social theory of learning also critiques conventional theories for separating learning from practice and for endorsing abstract, codified knowledge over the processes of knowing and practice (Amina and Roberts, 2008).[2] These scholars argue for "learning in action" as the appropriate theoretical frame to reflect how people learn in reality. People do not stop what they are doing to learn – they learn in the act of engaging and doing.

Perhaps the most concise and inclusive discussion of the main elements of LCs that builds on earlier work by Etienne Wenger is by Snyder and de Souza Briggs (2005)[3]:

MAIN ELEMENTS OF LEARNING COMMUNITIES
Community – who belongs to the LC. In an LC, member interaction is typically governed by mutual engagement, co-dependence and the pursuit of a joint enterprise.
Domain – what the LC is about. This means the common issues or problems that LC members wrestle with or consider essential to what they do. In doing so, the LC generates a "repertoire" (tools, documents, routines, vocabulary, symbols, artifacts, etc.) that embody the accumulated knowledge of the community (Wenger, 1998, 2000).
Practice – how the LC generates learning. This means that knowledge is generated in and through practice, abolishing the artificial separation between learning and action. Learning is generated as a result of the community doing real work together. The learning includes tacit knowledge, sometimes referred to as "know-how" ingrained in how people do things. It is knowing how to do something "by heart." The learning also generates explicit knowledge, sometimes referred to as "know-what." This is codified knowledge that is more easily transferrable (Griffith and Sawyer, 2010).
Source: Snyder and de Souza Briggs (2005)

Integrating the above brings us to a definition of LCs as groups of practitioners sharing a common concern or question, who deepen their knowledge and experience on a given topic or practice by learning together on an ongoing basis as they pursue their work.

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[1] Situated Learning: Legitimate Peripheral Participation. Jean Lave and Etienne Wenger (1991). New York: Cambridge University Press.

[2] "Knowing in action: Beyond communities of practice." Ash Amina and Joanne Roberts (2008). *Research Policy*, 37, 353–369.

[3] *Communities of Practice: A new tool for government managers*. William M. Snyder and Xavier de Souza Briggs (2005). Collaboration Series. IBM Center for the Business of Government.

Case Studies

As part of the study, RCLA undertook case studies of six learning communities that could serve as models for the larger grantmaking and nonprofit field. These LCs varied in duration, membership and purpose. Half of the cases were what we refer to as "funder-grantee LCs" and half were "peer LCs." In the former, the LC was a supplementary activity to a grantmaking program. In three cases, participants who received grants from the LC organizer were required to participate in the LC as part of their grant agreement. Both the grantmaker and the grantees participated in the LC. In peer LCs, participants were not grantees of any one program and did not share a relationship with any one funder. This does not mean that there was no funding sponsor. However, the sponsor did not participate in the LC as a learner. Participants in peer LCs shared a common profession or field of practice, challenge or opportunity. The distribution of the case study LCs along these two categories was as follows:

Funder-grantee LCs	Peer LCs
▪ Community Clinics Initiative – Networking for Community Health (CCI-NCH) ▪ Schools of the Future – Community of Learners (SOTF-COL) ▪ The Wallace Foundation – Professional Learning Communities (WF-PLC)	▪ Embedded Funders Learning Community (EFLC) ▪ Council of Michigan Foundations – Participatory Action Learning Network (CMF-PALN) ▪ Eureka-Boston

Below are summaries of each case:

Embedded Funders Learning Community (EFLC)

The Embedded Funders Learning Community (EFLC) grew out of research on philanthropy and community change conducted by Chapin Hall at the University of Chicago from 2000 to 2010. The research looked into the practice of foundations doing what Chapin Hall named "embedded philanthropy" because of these foundations' unusually intimate and long-term engagement with the communities in which they live and work.

Purpose: The goal was to exchange experiences among funders and delve deeply into "embedded" philanthropic practice.

Community: Members were 12-15 "embedded funders" across the US interested in exchanging deep learning about their practice. Meetings ranged in size from 16-22 members.

Domain: The group focused on issues of relevance to participants, such as their role as change agents, community relationships and partnerships, non-grantmaking tools and strategies, foundation effectiveness, and harnessing outside resources and partnerships for community change.

Practice: Most meetings were hosted by foundations grappling with issues onsite and in-action. The general theme for each meeting was set by the EFLC steering committee, with considerable input from the host foundation. Chapin Hall brought the academic lens that helped codify the learning.

Council of Michigan Foundations – Peer Action Learning Network (CMF-PALN)

The Council of Michigan Foundations (CMF) initiated the Peer Action Learning Network (PALN) in 2010 as part of the Transforming Michigan Philanthropy through Diversity and Inclusion initiative, which seeks to increase the effectiveness of organized philanthropy in Michigan. CMF began to address diversity issues in 2001 with a Board discussion that was followed in 2002 with a Board resolution adopting diversity as a value. A planning grant from The Kresge Foundation enabled CMF to work at a broader and deeper level to address diversity and inclusion.

Purpose: The goal was to strengthen participant organizations' capacity in diverse and inclusive leadership, management and grantmaking.

Community: Members consisted of high-level staff members, including CEOs, of Michigan foundations and organizations committed to becoming more diverse and inclusive.

Domain: The group focused on intercultural competence and diversity and inclusion in Michigan philanthropy.

Practice: An 11-month training with teams from participating organizations was combined with action learning projects at each participating foundation and coaching from facilitators.

Eureka-Boston

Eureka-Boston was founded in 2001 as a recurring two-year fellowship founded on networking and collaborative principles. Eureka-Boston was also pioneering in its focus on strengthening collaborative efforts across organizations and its emphasis on peer learning. What started as a deep-engagement model, with only seven fellows per cohort facilitated by one person, became the force behind the formation of the first nonprofit association in Massachusetts in 2007.

Purpose: The aim was to build a community of committed and networked nonprofit leaders who could join their efforts in tackling persistent social and public problems.

Community: Members consisted of 56 executive directors of Massachusetts nonprofits, who participated in eight cohorts from 2001-2005, and Steve Pratt, the initiator and facilitator of Eureka-Boston.

Domain: The focus was on issues and challenges related to nonprofit leadership, capacity and influence.

Practice: The two-year fellowship focused on a networked approach to action and action learning. Fellows met for half a day each month to address issues of common concern.

Community Clinics Initiative – Networking for Community Health (CCI-NCH)

The Community Clinics Initiative (CCI) is a $113 million collaborative effort between the California Endowment and the Tides Foundation. CCI was established in 1999 to support community health centers and clinics through major grants, technical assistance and knowledge sharing, with the ultimate objective of improving health outcomes in underserved communities in California. In 2008, CCI launched the Networking for Community Health (NCH) program to support and strengthen California community clinics' networking efforts, encouraging them to "go beyond their own four walls" in tackling health issues. A learning community was at the core of this effort.

Purpose: The aim has been to support and strengthen California community clinics' networking and knowledge-sharing efforts.

Community: California community clinics and regional clinic networks that have formed allies in the healthcare safety net and with community-based partners or agencies have participated. In the second cohort of 2010, there were 32 grantee clinics.

Domain: Participants have discussed their progress and challenges working on grant projects, and raised larger lessons for the field on issues of importance such as the role of youth and health promoters.

Practice: Grantees have come together in one-day convenings two to three times a year and have participated in monthly Webinars, site visits and an online platform to discuss common issues and challenges and to lift learning for the field.

Schools of the Future – Community of Learners (SOTF-COL)

Schools of the Future (SOTF) is a five-year, $5 million capacity-building initiative designed to encourage and mobilize schools to transform their learning environments and teaching strategies. Specifically, the initiative supports student-centered, project-based learning that prepares students to engage as knowledgeable citizens of the 21st century. The initiative is funded by Hawaii Community Foundation (HCF) and managed by the Hawaii Association for Independent Schools (HAIS).

Purpose: The aim has been to share experiences in applying innovative approaches to school learning and share knowledge with the field.

Community: Members have been mostly teachers, but also administrators and principals, from 18 Hawaii independent schools that were awarded grants from Hawaii Community Foundation.

Domain: Participants have discussed their progress and challenges working on grant projects and innovative learning strategies such as project-based and design-based learning.

Practice: Through an annual study tour, quarterly convenings, a Ning and periodic Webinars, participants have heard from experts about innovative learning practices and shared their experiences applying them in their schools.

The Wallace Foundation – Professional Learning Communities (WF-PLC)

The Wallace Foundation, a New York City-based national philanthropy, tackles complex public problems such as improving education and enrichment for disadvantaged children in US cities. One way that Wallace does this is by focusing on strengthening school leadership, a critical ingredient to school reform. Wallace's strategy is to support "innovation sites" to develop and test possible solutions, commission research and evaluation to fill gaps in current knowledge and learn lessons from the work in progress, and share knowledge broadly about what works and doesn't work. It has been supporting this work since 2000.

Purpose: The goal was to support grantee just-in-time learning and to lift lessons for the field of education about school leadership.

Community: Members were Wallace Foundation grantees from states and school districts working on strengthening school leadership, as well as researchers, field experts and representatives of various professional organizations.

Domain: The focus was on common issues jointly identified by Wallace and its grantees related to accelerating their progress in achieving their grant objectives.

Practice: The model included networking, large group engagement and action research work. Project groups of 12-15 participants from across states, school districts and support organizations work on action research projects that both improve their own practice and further knowledge for the field.

Study Findings

The following takeaways draw on the common success elements of the six case studies and those discussed in the literature, focusing on the design of LCs, their implementation and their outcomes.

I. Design to Create Maximum Value

Participating in an LC can be a significant time commitment, so LC organizers want to maximize value for the participant, the group and the funder. We discuss here some common design elements to leverage the learning for the greatest impact.

Augment other learning models by attending to peer learning, collective learning and learning in action.

Notwithstanding the broad theoretical foundations established in the literature, in reality there are no clear-cut boundaries that delineate LCs from other forms of learning. The examples studied included models that were predominantly peer exchange, like CCI-NCH, EFLC and WF-PLC; fellowship oriented like Eureka-Boston; or structured around training, like CMF-PALN. What we believe amplified these learning models was their attendance to key elements that are typically associated with LCs. We posit that LCs have the potential to amplify more conventional learning when they are designed and implemented with the following elements in mind:

1) Peer learning: Peers learned both from each other and from outside experts.
2) Collective form: The group setting added to the learning experience. Peers generated new learning by *being* together rather than merely exchanging learning they developed individually. The whole was greater than the sum of the parts.
3) Learning in action: This was achieved when participants drew on their current or past experience, not just engaged in abstract or theoretical learning. Sometimes the action component was intensified through site visits to successful models or through action learning projects where groups of peers worked on a specific project with a deliverable that would also advance their own work. The underlying lesson was to "make it about real life."

Advance work participants are already doing and contribute to a collective vision.

Participants seemed to get the most value from LCs that advanced work they were already doing. For example, grantees worked on LC projects that concomitantly advanced their programs, and practitioners grappled with questions they were facing in their daily practice. At the same time, an LC on the whole was likely to generate most value when participants bought into a collective vision that was larger than their individual learning aims. For example, SOTF-COL participants transformed teaching pedagogies to be more fitting with 21st century learning demands, and Eureka-Boston fellows worked to strengthen the nonprofit field in

Massachusetts. An LC can generate value both for the immediate work of its participants and, in the "big picture" sense, going beyond immediate work to address collective issues. Participants need both the immediate gratification of getting help with something pressing in their own work and the sense that they are tangibly contributing to something much bigger – a contribution they wouldn't otherwise have the opportunity to make.

Balance commonality and diversity in the backgrounds and expertise of members.

Maintaining diversity in the perspective and expertise of members was a recommendation that consistently came up in all of the cases. It is relatively easy to establish commonality in an LC, which by definition is a group of peers tackling a common issue or question. Equally important is ensuring a level of thought diversity that creates interdependence in learning (because participants complement each other's expertise), makes collaboration possible (because each participant has something that the other does not) and helps to finesse how the learning is applied. LCs that risk becoming too inward focused can also benefit from the periodic infusion of an external perspective from other experts who can bring new information at key moments.

Engage senior leaders and groups of participants to help drive change at organizations.

Senior staff participated in all of the LCs studied, and the learning was amplified when the participating senior executive was joined by other members of his/her team. The logic here is that the participation of teams of participants, or top leaders, or both together, can create the critical mass needed to effect change at the organization, if that is the objective. Obviously when both leaders and staff participate together in an LC, they can really drive home the learning and introduce changes. However, for small organizations it means that several core team members may be away at the same time.

Only drive participant collaborations if it will help their work or is critical to the LC vision.

LCs are by default intense collaborative learning structures. Unless it is integral to participants' work or central to the LC's theory of change, including collaborative work in LCs comes with its own challenges and requires additional resources for facilitation. The cases studied had the common underlying assumption that peers share many of the same questions and challenges, so learning collaboratively could only help them deal with those challenges. In addition, some LCs, like WF-PLC, relied on structured collaboration among participants through action research group projects because the program's vision was to strengthen school leadership and to embed it as a policy conversation at the district and state levels. WF-PLC was prepared to offer high-touch facilitation for each action research project.

II. Implement with Evolution in Mind

Much of the literature discusses the emergent nature and fluid structure of LCs as desirable characteristics. This point is corroborated by the cases, which continued to adapt to the evolving learning needs of their participants without compromising their broad parameters

related to vision. Below are some points related to continual adaptation as well as success factors related to implementation in general.

Demonstrate success or facilitate an early "win" early on.

Several LCs, namely SOTF-COL, Eureka-Boston and CCI-NCH, cited the importance of demonstrating success early on through a site visit. Especially when an LC is first starting it is difficult to visualize what would make it successful or what participants are expected to achieve if practice change is the objective. A site visit, therefore, helps to give participants a first-hand experience early on. In the cases studied, the site visits helped the group understand what success look like and seek to emulate it. Another way of demonstrating success is to enable the group to achieve a small early win together as a way of building momentum and trust, a strategy employed by WF-PLC.

Shifts between peer- and expert-driven learning can reinvigorate the LC.

While LCs are described in the literature as predominantly peer-led learning vehicles, injecting "expert" input can help reinvigorate an LC when learning seems to become stale. There were some notable shifts from expert- to peer-driven learning in SOTF-COL, and from peer- to expert-driven learning in CCI-NCH and WF-PLC. In SOTF-COL, program managers realized that as grantees were implementing their programs, they were utilizing new practices and becoming experts in their own experience. It made sense for expert input to be front-loaded to provide the tools and knowledge necessary for peers to engage in implementation. The opposite was the case in CCI-NCH. In CCI-NCH, the very specific types of expertise required on technical aspects of their grants meant that participants needed more expert input.

Engage facilitators who bring both process and content expertise.

In participants' view, a good facilitator acknowledged everyone's perspective, documented and synthesized learning, and helped move the group toward fulfilling their commitments, particularly in action learning projects. Good facilitators were also able to adapt in the moment to participants' pressing issues or learning needs. In most cases, facilitators were not only regarded as people who could help the group learn at its best, but also sources of learning. They helped inject content expertise at the right time and added overall value to participants' learning experience. In LCs where collaborations between participants was a desired outcome, facilitators played an important role in weaving the community and building trust in a way that could help collaboration to emerge organically.

Support different modes of engagement and craft individualized projects.

Participant ebb and flow is not only inevitable in an LC, it is also healthy. The literature stresses that an LC success is not equivalent with its own duration or its members' continued engagement. As learning evolves, some members may find less connection to the LC and it is natural to become less engaged or drop out. Most of the LCs studied offered a combination of mandatory, often large group convenings and optional interim activities. CCI-NCH practiced

another form of flexibility, in which clinics had discretion to nominate any three members of their teams to attend the large group convenings. This strategy can prevent the overburdening of participants, yet has the potential to compromise community building because the frequency of interaction between members is reduced. Creating opportunities for participants to work on group projects that interest them most is a high-engagement strategy that can help sustain participant interest, if participants are interested in dedicating the time on such projects.

Community building is important but not always a priority.

While the literature discusses "community" as one of the main pillars of an LC, in the cases studied, community bonding and identity were not always perceived as priorities. For example, in CCI-NCH, the participants spent much time together over the years, which contributed to bonding, and yet it was more important to establish high visibility for the community clinic field than building the internal cohesion of the LC. In the cases where community building was of high importance, organizers relied on specific and intentional strategies. In Eureka-Boston, the theory of change was premised on a strong sense of community among fellows. One way the facilitator helped foster this was by asking fellows to bring in personal artifacts with which they could tell stories about their lives. An indirect way that a sense of community was established was through participants' belief that the LC served a larger purpose than individual learning. Each LC had a big mission, and grantees' sense of purpose intensified as they could see the kind of impact they were making.

LC sponsors can play various roles in addition to learning partner.

Grantees appreciated when LC funders positioned themselves as learning partners who were sharing the participant's struggle and grappling with the same challenges. However, other than participating as a learner, sponsors can play multiple valuable roles in an LC. For example, focusing on building meta-learning for the field or taking the learning into policy settings is an invaluable role, which does not require funder presence in all LC activities. This can be especially helpful in new LCs where trust is still building and grantees are wary of candid conversations with funder presence.

Sometimes participants need support for continued success "back home."

In some of the cases studied participants experienced negative consequences, either for introducing changes back in their organizations that others did not welcome, or for experiencing a personal transformation that made it difficult to continue in the same environment. Whereas all of the LCs encouraged risk-taking and innovation, before these incidents occurred, they did not quite anticipate how to deal with these issues. LC organizers and facilitators should anticipate the occurrence of such challenges and make themselves available to participants experiencing these issues. At the same time, part of the onus also falls on the participant to seek support and guidance from LC organizers, facilitators or peers.

Continual just-in-time feedback leads to iterative improvements and eventually "getting it right."

The six LCs were not static entities but communities of continual emergence and improvement. Over the years, and through various iterations, program organizers, especially in the funder-grantee LCs were able to respond to challenges just-in-time and provide adjustments accordingly. This took holding regular frequent meetings between organizers and facilitators and gathering continual anecdotal feedback from participants even before obtaining results from formal evaluations.

III. Recognize and Communicate Multiple Outcomes

Especially for the LCs designed in service of larger grantmaking programs, it is often challenging to tease out LC outcomes that are distinct from the program. Nevertheless, it is important to recognize that success looks different for each LC and that positive outcomes will often be discovered as an LC goes on rather than confirming predefined indicators of success.

Success takes many forms, from building knowledge to changing practice to achieving scale.

All of the LCs studied were instrumental in building knowledge both for the community itself and the field more generally. For example, The Wallace Foundation built knowledge for the education field, in part by investing in research that challenged and validated the learning emerging from the LC. On another level, several LCs set out to change individual and/or organizational practice. For example, SOTF aimed to change pedagogical practices at Hawaii schools, and CMF-PALN's goal was to help individuals and organizations become more inclusive. The following approaches, discussed throughout this summary, contributed to changing practice:

- Supporting a core group of participants from each organization
- Providing supplemental support to help apply the learning
- Facilitating continued success "back home"
- Encouraging senior-level participation
- Demonstrating examples of success
- Immersing the learning in grounded, concrete examples
- Investing in trust building and bonding between LC participants to facilitate candid sharing and learning
- Sharing responsibility with participants for designing sessions and voicing their concerns on a regular basis

On yet another level, all of the LCs studied contributed to scaling effective practice. For example, in CCI-NCH a project originally focused on increasing health-related data collection about the Asian and Pacific Islander community and raising awareness about health disparities decided to create a community garden after being exposed to other grantees with gardening projects through the LC and seeing a critical need in their community. It helped that CCI provided small supplemental grants to enable grantees to adopt these practices. Similarly,

when action learning groups came out with a pragmatic and useful product in WF-PLC, it catapulted the learning across the country. For example, one of the groups addressed the challenges facing principals that prevented them from devoting more time to instructional leadership by creating a new role called the School Administration Manager (SAM) to support the principal in making change. So far, this role has been introduced in 37 districts across nine states. Eureka-Boston offers another example of scaled practice in which fellows were able to develop an entirely new entity, the Massachusetts Nonprofit Network, to address for the first time the collective needs of nonprofits in the state.

One research proposition in need of further testing is that LCs hold potential for changing and/or scaling practice because they are based on real experience, making change both more tangible and tenable.

Less measurable outcomes like community and trust often precede more tangible outcomes.

Often, creating the right environment of safety, trust and respect can invite and facilitate the LC's greater aims of changing or scaling practice or impacting the field. Participants interviewed regularly referred to "having more resources at their fingertips" and their peers' generosity in sharing connections and other resources. While the exchange of information and connections is not in itself an example of changed practice or joint action, it is indeed a precursor and indicator of collective action that should not be dismissed.

Capture and communicate what success looks like.

We have discussed the importance of gathering continual feedback and stories without waiting for the results of formal evaluations. Understanding an LC's impact requires being open to the multiple ways that LCs can achieve success. Some examples of outcomes include:

Visibility: LCs such as CCI-NCH and WF-PALN invested heavily in bringing the voices of their participants to the policy table and placing community clinics and school leadership, respectively, on the map. Others, such as Eureka-Boston, achieved enormous visibility for the role of the nonprofit sector in Massachusetts. The cases highlight the power of LCs to shed light on certain issues or heighten the influence of a certain set of actors, given the right resources.

Expanded peer/resource networks: LC participants reported the formation of lasting relationships with peers and the generous exchange of resources and information. The culture of sharing is often the product of investing in community building.

Collaborations: In Eureka-Boston, where collaboration was integral to the theory of change, several participant organizations joined forces on certain projects, and on another scale, fellows participated in founding the first Massachusetts nonprofit association. In other examples, such as SOTF-COL and EFLC, learning partnerships emerged between dyads or groups of participants, in which they visited each other to learn from their respective work and remained in touch as mutual resources. When collaborations emerged organically, it was partly because the learning environment was conducive to trust and mutual respect.

Transformational learning: Apart from, and sometimes as a precondition to changing individual or organizational practice, participants mentioned deep personal revelations and heightened awareness or understanding of an issue. CMF-PALN offered many examples of participants becoming more respectful in their communications with peers, more empathetic in their outlook and more understanding of the complexities of cultural competence.

Resilience: In several cases participants reported developing capacity for engaging in difficult conversations and dealing with difficult situations more generally. Eureka-Boston fellows have improved their "staying power" at organizations and developed mechanisms for dealing with burnout. Our hunch is that the peer support made available through LCs and their environment of innovation and experimentation help participants become more resilient in the face of challenges.

Enhanced capacity for learning: Apart from the knowledge the LCs generated, participants have also become more adept learners. SOTF-COL offers an excellent example of how participants can amplify learning by creating parallel learning spaces at their own schools and between schools. In our view, this is a significant and sustained contribution that ensures that benefits extend far beyond the LC itself.

Study Methodology

The methodology included these steps, completed from September-December 2011:

- **Setting the parameters and guidelines for research:** Initial conversations with GEO and the Corporation for National and Community Service (CNCS) yielded a set of parameters to help guide the search for LC examples. The most important were that the LC is made up of members from across organizations, blends face-to-face and virtual communications, and has a collective purpose beyond the learning aspirations of each individual.
- **Theory/concept review:** The study team searched academic engines and practitioner-friendly publications, and reviewed 53 references for definitions, theoretical foundations and strategies for seeding or facilitating LCs.
- **Scan of learning communities:** RCLA cast a wide net to identify LC examples by conducting a Web-based search, looking up cited examples in the literature, and having conversations with key informants. RCLA then generated an initial list of 37 LCs that were identified as having learning potential for GEO.
- **Validation calls:** After eliminating solely online LCs, RCLA complemented the initial information found by conducting validation calls with 21 LCs.
- **Case study selection:** Six LCs were identified by RCLA, GEO and CNCS for further study. Key considerations in selection included maintaining a range of LC type and duration, studying both loosely structured LCs and those with predefined learning activities and requirements for participation, and the LC's resonance and success.
- **Case study interviews:** The team then conducted hour-long interviews with three to five individuals from each case, including both foundation officers and LC organizers, and LC participants.
- **Learning Summit:** In a half-day session hosted by GEO, RCLA shared overall findings with a group of leaders from GEO, CNCS and member foundations in GEO's network.