



# What does it mean to be a Community Development Quarterback?

A Real-time Learning Brief

Findings from BRIDGE Housing Corporation's work at Jordan Downs

October 27, 2014



## Background

Over the past 40 years, shifts in the needs and characteristics of American poverty have required approaches to housing and the field of community development to evolve (Erickson, Galloway, & Cytron, 2012)<sup>1</sup>. *Investing in What Works for America's Communities* (2012)<sup>2</sup>, highlights lessons learned from the past 40 years with the goal of increasing the magnitude and impact of work to rejuvenate low income communities (Belsky & Fauth, 2012)<sup>3</sup>. The work presented in this Learning Brief is very much in progress; but it represents early attempts to implement a key lesson learned from the past 40 years of community development – the “quarterback” model (*Investing in What Works for America's Communities*, 2012). The quarterback model suggests that community development efforts are most effective when there is a key stakeholder who coordinates and guides activities, rallies stakeholders and focuses attention on collective community impact.

The Citi Foundation and the Low Income Investment Fund (LIIF) launched the Partners in Progress (PIP) initiative to support 13 organizations in their implementation of community development efforts in 10 regions across the country using the framework and lessons learned as outlined in *Investing in What Works for America's Communities* (2012). All 13 organizations have a single focus: to increase economic progress in low income communities. BRIDGE Housing Corporation was awarded one of the 13 PIP Grants to play a quarterback role and support community development in two California communities: Potrero Hill Terrace and Annex (in San Francisco) and Jordan Downs (in Los Angeles). **As a quarterback, BRIDGE's role is that of organizer, capacity builder and keeper of the vision that is focused on bringing together partners who care about community impact.** The PIP grant provides an opportunity for BRIDGE to learn from the efforts in San Francisco and Los Angeles so that this approach can be taken to scale across BRIDGE communities and used to inform similar efforts nationwide.

The purpose of this real-time learning brief is to document what BRIDGE and its partners have learned about the quarterback role as they work to revitalize the community within and surrounding the Jordan Downs public housing development in Watts (Los Angeles). Currently owned and managed by the Housing Authority of the City of Los Angeles (HACLA), Jordan Downs was built by the Federal Government in the mid-1940s as the first Veterans Housing Project in the country and was converted into public housing in the 1950s by HACLA.

The multi-phase redevelopment of Jordan Downs calls for building up to 1,400 mixed income homes, including a one-for-one replacement of the existing 700 units of public housing. The plans also include new retail outlets, community centers, parks, and a comprehensive Human Capital Plan to provide a continuum of family support, job training, and community programs for residents.

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<sup>1</sup> Erickson, D., Galloway, I., & Cytron, N. (2012). Routinizing the extraordinary. In Andrews, N.O., Erickson, D.J., Galloway, I.J., & Seidman, E.S. (Eds.), *Investing in what works for America's communities: Essays on people, place, & purpose* (pp. 377-406). San Francisco: Federal Reserve Bank of San Francisco & Low Income Investment Fund.

<sup>2</sup> Andrews, N.O., Erickson, D.J., Galloway, I.J., & Seidman, E.S. (Eds.), *Investing in what works for America's communities: Essays on people, place & purpose*. San Francisco: Federal Reserve Bank of San Francisco & Low Income Investment Fund.

<sup>3</sup> Belsky, E. S., & Fauth, J. (2012). Crossing Over to an Improved Era of Community Development. In Andrews, N.O., Erickson, D.J., Galloway, I.J., & Seidman, E.S. (Eds.), *Investing in what works for America's communities: Essays on people, place & purpose* (pp. 72-103). San Francisco: Federal Reserve Bank of San Francisco & Low Income Investment Fund.

The findings in this brief were based on a review of project planning documents, meeting notes, and interviews with five staff from four key partner organizations involved with the community development work at Jordan Downs including The Michaels Organization, SHIELDS for Families, Housing Authority of the City of Los Angeles, and BRIDGE Housing Corporation. The roles of the interviewed staff include project and program managers and senior-level executives. Interviews lasted 30-45 minutes and were conducted by researchers from Harder+Company Community Research in September and October 2014.

## Purpose and Value of a Quarterback

In conversations with stakeholders, BRIDGE staff members have not actively used the term “quarterback” to define their role in the Jordan Downs redevelopment effort. Therefore, during interviews for this learning brief, we defined the quarterback role and asked stakeholders what the value and purpose of a quarterback might be in the context of community building and redevelopment. This is an important cross-check of the validity of the quarterback concept; it is important to know if those working “on the ground” perceive the quarterback role in the way it is proposed and as it is executed in practice.

Perceptions about the purpose and value of the quarterback role were similar across the group. One interviewee described how there are *“many participants with lots of ideas and experiences and best practices, but to have somebody, an entity or a person, who can orchestrate and develop a plan with the participants, understand the goals, outcomes, schedules, different roles for the participants, to facilitate conversation and planning sessions is critical.”* Another reason quarterbacks were viewed as valuable is because they maintain “continuity over time”, and they play a key part in “keeping a vision.”

*“People hear the word quarterback and immediately their brains go to domination or decision-making power...but I don’t see it as that at all. People say that the quarterback calls the shots. Well, actually no. The coach technically calls the shots. The quarterback carries it through but the whole team has to be on board for the call to work...[T]he quarterback’s job is to have a view of the field and the view of the game and to know what quivers the team has in its basket, but everyone has to agree that we’re going in that direction. Everyone has to see what their part is, and everyone has to have full ownership of their role for it to really work.”*

One interviewee described that *“as we transition from a public housing development to what will be more of a private housing development, [the quarterback is] there to make sure that it is done as gracefully as possible and for all the powers that be to feel supported in that process.”* Another interviewee said that *“these are really complex projects with lots of moving pieces. The quarterback is the organization that needs to have a holistic, integrated and long-term vision of what this is supposed to do...not to say other people don’t own parts of it...but having someone in that seat who is fully dedicated to the vision and the view is important.”*

## What are the Characteristics of an Effective Quarterback?

The evaluation team employed thematic content analysis to identify the characteristics of an effective quarterback from interview transcripts and notes. Across interviewees, the characteristics of an effective quarterback include:

- ✦ Knowledgeable about and committed to communities and services

- + Extensive experience in community building, service provision, and collaboration with diverse agencies and organizations
- + Ability to recruit support and participation from local partners that already have a strong connection with the community
- + Good leader who merits respect, encourages participation, listens well, and is open-minded
- + Ability to engender an open environment where everyone feels that their view is valued, their voice is heard, and that they are part of the process
- + Ability to speak to individuals and families in the community and promote their involvement
- + Demonstration of long-term commitment to the community

The evaluation team has observed all Jordan Downs Human Capital-focused meetings<sup>4</sup> since the beginning of 2014. In that time, BRIDGE has taken a lead in setting meeting agendas, scheduling and leading meetings, and mobilizing partners to action to support community building efforts at Jordan Downs. For example, BRIDGE funded an independent analysis of the current service model in Jordan Downs in order to support HACLA's request to renew SHIELDS for Families' services contract during predevelopment and development. Part of being a quarterback is being strategic and making sure the partners' strengths are deployed appropriately and effectively. Another example is when BRIDGE and other organizations supported a large community event in August 2014 that SHIELDS for Families organized and led.

One important caveat that emerged from several interviews was that it isn't necessary for the quarterback to have detailed knowledge of the local circumstances as long as relationships with local partners are strong. In the case of Jordan Downs, although BRIDGE was less well established in Southern California than other parts of the state, strong local partners helped fill in the gaps in understanding important historical and political contextual factors for the work. A key to success that was described by one interviewee was that *"if you are from the outside coming in, it is critical to find someone on the inside already to make it work. Not that you can't make it work the other way, it just takes much longer than if you're using someone that the community already knows and trusts."*

When examining the themes that emerged about the purpose and value of quarterback, it was interesting that stakeholders did not associate the concept of accountability for the development process with the quarterback. This could be the result of the questions asked by the evaluators, or the recognition that development is a complex process and rarely under the control of one organization.

## Successes and Challenges: What has worked, what hasn't

BRIDGE was viewed as assuming the "quarterback" role in late 2013 when the partnership group working on the redevelopment of Jordan Downs banded together to focus on the Department of Housing and Urban Development's Choice Neighborhoods application for a \$30 million grant. Preparing the grant submission clarified BRIDGE's readiness as quarterback for this project and propelled the group to expand to 25-30 new and previous partners (with essential and invaluable help from HACLA and SHIELDS), to create structure, and have conversations that were needed to move the project forward. The interviewees recounted that the group

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<sup>4</sup> These meetings focus on social services strategies, fundraising, and data sharing.

has become closer, more effective, and has “gelled” since they came together to apply for the grant in winter 2013. Although the group didn’t receive the grant, it was a key developmental milestone because the core partnership group continued to move forward together with the same momentum and focus despite not receiving the funding.

Beyond the logistical accomplishments (such as completing the Master Plan and environmental approval for the phase one development site), building trust among partners, the community, and local government was cited as one of the key successes of the past year. One of the interviewees summed it up this way: *“we need everyone around the table to make this a success...[I]t is not about one person or one group having dominance...[I]t is so big, you have to have political, social, financial will of big institutions and big people that can push that agenda forward.”* Another interviewee explained how in the past year, the group has broadened what they are doing and are focusing on working together toward achieving common goals for Jordan Downs and the families that live there.

One strength, in particular, was the improved sharing of information as one interviewee described it. *“BRIDGE has given us a whole lot more clarity on the development process in terms of where we are headed which makes it much clearer for us to help the residents focus, and we’re getting real-time information...[T]hey have included us in the information cycle, so we are aware of when there are issues and delays...and that is critical to our work with the residents.”* Despite the increased level of visibility in the community, however, another interviewee explained how more work needs to be done going forward to ensure this information is passed on to the families living at Jordan Downs, so that they feel informed and have a clear understanding of which organizations are involved in the redevelopment work.

One potential challenge for BRIDGE was coming into a development project as an outsider to the community and the partnership group. One interviewee saw BRIDGE’s role as more of a *“new coach than a quarterback...[T]hey are coming in after there was already a starting quarterback...[T]he on the ground folks that are there every day for the community are the quarterback.”* But all interviewees agree that BRIDGE has done a good job merging with the preexisting partnership group. As one interviewee described, *“[A BRIDGE staffer] didn’t come in saying ‘hey we’re in charge’, [a BRIDGE staffer] very much came in and respected the partnership that already existed and became more a part of it, and that has worked really well...and just them becoming a part of us, us becoming a part of them and including us at their table that has been very effective for this whole process...I see us as true team members with them moving forward. We’re all there for the same reason.”*

Interviewees recognized that BRIDGE was successful, at least in part, because they put their own ego aside and took the time to build relationships with existing community development stakeholders, including HACLA, SHIELDS, other members of the service collaborative, and residents.

There are, however, logistical challenges for the quarterback including grappling with how to pay for all of the work, how to phase it, what happens if contracts aren’t renewed, and continuing to evolve definitions and expectations of roles for themselves and their partners.

## Next Steps: Moving forward in the quarterback role and at Jordan Downs

An important next step for the quarterback and partners at Jordan Downs is to deepen their presence in the community. Several of the interviewees described the need to build a unique identity and develop clear branding of the partnership so that the community has a clear image of who is leading the redevelopment effort. As BRIDGE and their partners increase engagement and communication with the families at Jordan Downs with a unified identity, they also need to directly share concrete plans and the vision for the community.

Within the group, partners have embraced BRIDGE's role as a quarterback; they look to BRIDGE to provide guidance on roles and expectations of core partners, to extend partnerships as needed, and to help the partnership become sustainable to ensure successful redevelopment over the long-haul as the project progresses.

## Words of Wisdom: Lessons learned and promising practices

Practical advice from the interviewees regarding successful and sustainable partnership working in community development and the quarterback model is listed below.

### Helpful Hints and Practical Considerations

- + Ensure local partners with strong ties to the community and a deep understanding of local context are included in the process from the beginning to the end
- + Establish a unique identity of the partnership group and brand accordingly
- + Develop a logic model and plan early on to ensure a well-defined roadmap is established
- + Write everything down to preserve history, context, and document decisions in the face of changing staff
- + Do a door-to-door needs assessment at the beginning to build a relationship with the community, understand needs, and signal a change
- + Get the structure of your partnership in writing to ensure everyone has a clear understanding of their roles and responsibilities
- + Be clear on governance, decision-making process, raising money, accountability, and measurement from the start
- + Ensure frequent and direct visibility of the group, ideas, and plans to the community and other stakeholders. Be honest and keep everyone up to date as plans and timelines shift.
- + The Development Plan needs to be clear. Sharing the renderings helps garner excitement about the project.
- + “From the beginning you need to plan for the end”— plan for transitions including leadership changing, programs evolving, plans being modified, so that residents aren't locked into one plan or one person

The history of Jordan Downs is one of the many reasons that it is a complex community development project and an interesting case study for the quarterback model. As BRIDGE has experienced firsthand, the role of

quarterback (and in some instances coach as well) is somewhat developmental and they have had to learn when to step up and when to step back. A successful quarterback has the ability to see how things are changing along the way and adapt accordingly, which is analogous to how a quarterback in football calls an audible in the moment to react to the defense.

As increasing numbers of community development projects employ the quarterback model, it will be worthwhile to compare lessons learned across the different community contexts and partnership groups. As one interviewee concluded, it is important to recognize that community development work *“is based on so many complex factors that you can’t take another model and import it to another community. Part of doing good community development is listening to what’s happening and being responsive and in the moment....[T]here is no scientific method for community development...it has to be so much more organic.”*

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