INNOVATION CENTER
for community & youth development

Encircling Institutions:
Surrounding youth in crisis with mutual engagement, commitment and trust

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February 7, 2006

Executive Summary

Collaboration and shared communication between non-profit and civic agencies are becoming increasingly important as funders look more towards evidence of collaborative efforts when considering proposals to support. However, collaboration is not always done for the purpose of self-interest on the part of the organization. Roca, a youth development organization in Chelsea, MA, has demonstrated through their programs and work that positive collaboration between institutions can originate from core organizational values, regardless of any financial or practical incentives. This approach has become known as the Engaged Institutions (EI) strategy and is demonstrating remarkable success in helping Roca and its partners achieve their goals of providing meaningful opportunities to the most hard to reach young people.

The EI strategy was born as Roca realized that its core values of belonging, generosity, competence and independence needed to be lived not only among staff members and participants of the organization, but in its relationships with other public and private agencies in its locality. In order to ensure that the most high risk young people would receive the comprehensive services that they needed, Roca had previously used confrontational power organizing strategies to force other agencies to change or improve ineffective practices with regard to young people. Through the EI strategy, Roca has been able to develop a climate of shared values and practices among staff in partner agencies, and promising practices include widespread use and recognition of Roca's method of peacemaking circles, better communication and transparency between organizations, and a commitment to truth telling. While this initial overview of the EI strategy documents the approach and lessons learned from this promising strategy for institutional engagement, a complete reflection and evaluation plan is needed in order to better understand the key dimensions of the approach and the individual, organizational- and community-level impacts the strategy has created.

Introduction

Collaboration with other agencies is often heralded as a way for nonprofits to eliminate duplication of services and reduce costs. It is common for agencies to seek collaborative opportunities both to improve their results as well as to demonstrate to funders that they are willing to work in collaboration. Concrete indicators of collaboration are often required by funders in funding proposals, as are letters of support from other agencies. Visible cooperation among agencies is an important aspect of success.

Shared communication among agencies is also becoming increasingly important. The emergence of new forms of web-based technology has fostered an increasing preponderance of collaborative ventures between non profit agencies ranging from shared information portals such as the National Collaboration for Youth's Youth Development Information Center (www.nydic.org), to advocacy efforts such as the virtual Youth Policy Action Center (www.youthpolicyactioncenter.org). Efforts such as these provide easy centralized access to useful resources and information, and demonstrate to funders

that agencies are willing to share access to information. However, these efforts often require only a basic and superficial degree of collaboration that, after the initial check for mission alignment by the agency's executive director, simply entails cooperation and information sharing by the agency's communication staff. While these types of cooperative communication efforts are becoming quite common, collaborative efforts that require extensive agency involvement or sharing of resources and risk are unfortunately still quite atypical despite the promise of improved results that they bring.

Teresa Hogue describes five levels of collaboration: networking, cooperation or alliance, coordination or partnership, coalition, and collaboration outlined in Table 1 (Hogue, 1994).[1] These increasingly intensive levels of intentional cooperation and shared action among agencies represent conventional thinking in regard to collaboration. Beginning at the superficial level of networking, a non hierarchical and informal arrangement designed to share information without the need for formal leadership structures, each subsequent level requires increasingly more formal structure, commitment, decision making and shared resources among agencies. The fifth level, collaboration, is characterized by highly structured and explicit systems, commitments, decision-making structures and intended outcomes supported by written agreements and defined accountability for interdependent outcomes and results.

Table1: Definitions of Forms of Partnership

Levels	Purpose	Structure	Process
Networking	• Dialogue and common understanding • Clearinghouse for information • Create base of support	• Non-hierarchal • Loose/ flexible link • Roles loosely defined • Community action is primary link among members	• Low key leadership • Minimal decision making • Little conflict • Informal communication
Cooperation or Alliance	• Match needs and provide coordination • Limit duplication of services • Ensure tasks are done	• Central body of people as communication hub • Semi-formal links • Roles somewhat defined • Links are advisory • Group levereages/ raises money	• Facilitative leaders • Complex decision making • Some conflict • Formal communications within central group
Coordination or Partnership	• Share resources to address common issues • Merge resource base to create something new	• Central body of people consists of decision makers • Roles defined • Links formalized • Group develops new resources and joint budget	• Autonomous leadership but focus is on issue • Group decision making in central and subgroups • Communication is frequent and clear
Coalition	• Share ideas and be willing to pull resources from existing systems • Develop commitment for a minimum of three years	• All members involved in decision making • Roles and time defined • Links with written agreement • Group develops new resources and joint budget	• Shared leadership • Decision making formal with all members • Communication is common and prioritized
Collaboration	• Accomplish shared vision and impact benchmarks • Build interdependent system to address issues and opportunities	• Consensus used in shared decision making • Roles, time and evaluation formalized • Links are formal and written in work assignments	• Leadership high, trust level high, productivity high • Ideas and decisions equally shared • Highly developed communication

Source: Community Based Collaborations – Wellness Multiplied 1994,
Teresa Hogue, Oregon Center for Community Leadership

[1] From Community Based Collaborations – Wellness Multiplied 1994, Teresa Hogue, Oregon Center for Community Leadership. Table adapted from Fish Research West, http://www.fishresearchwest.org/get_involved/definitions_collaborations.pdf

The levels of collaboration defined by Hogue and the approach to collaboration used by most agencies can be thought of as a form of strategic shared action. Opportunistic at its core, it is rooted in a type of cerebral understanding that sharing information, resources or leadership with other individuals or agencies will benefit individual staff or contribute to the actualization of an organization's mission.

However, as demonstrated in the institutional engagement work of Roca, a youth development agency in Chelsea, MA, the roots of collaborative actions need not always be solely driven by intellect and organizational self interest. Challenging the intellectual and strategic catalyst paradigm for collaboration, Roca's remarkable strategy of engaged institutions originated from a foundation of values - an emergent understanding of the ethical way to be in relationship with other agencies and institutions regardless of conventional wisdom, history, common practice, or financial sense. This paper attempts to begin the process of documenting and understanding this extraordinary approach to promoting better outcomes for the most high-risk young people through institutional engagement.

Background

In July 2002, Roca made a commitment to respond to the tremendous economic, educational, and developmental needs of young people ages 16-26 at highest risk in the communities of Chelsea, Revere, Lynn, and East Boston, Massachusetts. These groups of young people are often unable to access and effectively participate in traditional programming in schools, adult basic education programs, job training programs, young parent programs, and other programs for young people, and often need tremendous support to reach a stage of readiness to participate in opportunities that will enable them to succeed in life.

This commitment required Roca to set out on a new path, building on their success with high-risk younger youth to design education and employment developmental opportunities for the most high-risk and in-need young adults. Little has been written about how to design effective services and supports for these high-risk young adult populations, yet faced with almost overwhelming needs of the community, Roca was determined to work with young adults, community partners, and the systems in which the young people were involved to design and implement effective programs for these, the community's most high-risk young people. The Via Project is the result of these collaborative program design and implementation efforts.

For Roca the motivation to create the Via Project and model new ways of work were two-fold: first, a commitment to creating new program methodology that would increase high-risk young people's education and employment outcomes; and second, a commitment to the field of youth and community development. Therefore, from the program's conception, Roca was committed to designing ongoing reflection, documentation, and evaluation processes that would not only help guide program design, but also yield badly needed lessons, insights, and new program models that inform the organizational

development efforts of Roca as well as the work of others who seek to provide meaningful opportunities for the most hard to reach young people.

About Roca

Roca is a values-led community-based youth and young adult development organization, providing services and developmental opportunities to the most high-risk young people in Chelsea, Revere, Lynn, and East Boston, Massachusetts. Founded in 1988, Roca works to actualize a vision of young people thriving and leading change through its mission of promoting justice by fostering opportunities to lead happy and healthy lives. Towards that end, Roca creates places where change can happen and, subsequently, generates hope.

Because Roca believes that every young person counts, it is relentless in its outreach to, acceptance of, and expectations for their communities' most disenfranchised young people. In helping young people realize their full potential, Roca works with individuals, communities, organizations, and systems to increase readiness for participation and to change the context in which young people live and grow. Roca's successful *Youth and Young Adult Development Model* builds on evidence-based practices and 17 years of experience (See Attachment 1). As a learning organization, Roca is committed to excellence in its work and to pioneering innovative strategies that contribute to and invigorate the youth development field.

Roca's Theory of Change can be summarized as: young people thrive and lead change when they understand, practice, and live the four values of

1) Belonging (every young person counts and has a place in the world),
2) Generosity (every young person has a purpose and can contribute),
3) Competence (physical, cognitive, emotional, and spiritual development is important for all people), and
4) Independence (every young person has the capacity to live out of harm's way and become self-sufficient).

In order to ensure that young people have every opportunity possible to experience these values, Roca is committed to engaging organizations, institutions, and systems in actualizing these values in their work with young people. Through engagement across organizations and communities, they hope to increase the variety of contexts where these values are reinforced and young people can experience concrete and authentic opportunities to grow.

Roca creates opportunities for youth and young adults to thrive by helping them understand, practice, and live these values. The following five key strategies are used to engage, heal, nurture, and catalyze the development of program participants:

1) **Relentless street work and outreach** designed to connect with the most at-risk and disengaged youth and young adults, beginning a bond at their unique level of

need and readiness that builds trust, communication, and interest in positive developmental opportunities and services;

2) **Transformational relationships** which promote mutual change through an intentional commitment to one's own and another's growth and development;

3) **Peacemaking circles** that promote personal learning, healing, accountability, and community building;

4) **Creating opportunities for education, employment and civic participation** that are the means for achieving self-sufficiency and community involvement; and

5) **Engaging institutions** to increase the collective work and capacity of Roca and social service, educational, criminal justice, health, employment, and other community partners to achieve positive outcomes for young people and their communities.

Via – Program Innovation in Two Dimensions

Roca's Via project is an unique programmatic and systemic change initiative designed to respond to the tremendous economic, educational and developmental needs of young people ages 16-26 at highest risk in the communities of Chelsea, Revere, Lynn, and East Boston. Via is unlike other program models that focus solely on providing program interventions and developmental opportunities for young people. It is first distinguished by the scope of the work envisioned by the theory of change, moving beyond program and service delivery to include system change and institutional intervention. The overarching goals include not only program outcomes for young adults, but also capacity and relationship building among institutions.

The second distinguishing element is the comprehensiveness of the Via Project design and support services for participants. Educational programming, employment training, enrichment programs, prevention, intervention and access to a 24 hour a day, 7 days a week social services support network are all integrated into the Via program delivery model. This high level of support and comprehensive programming are most often found only in residential programs, while community-based programs such as Roca usually specialize in one or two areas of development such as education, health promotion, court advocacy, or employment, among others. The importance of Roca's ability to provide support and advocacy for the wide range of social, educational, and employment services needed by individual young people through the model of the outreach worker and transformational relationships cannot be understated. This commitment to ensuring that young people experience consistent, positive and relevant support and access to opportunities with every agency with which they interact is the driving purpose of Roca's engaged institution strategy.

In Via, the development of the most high-risk and disengaged young people is perceived as a dynamic process in which people, institutions, and communities come together with a young person to support their positive growth, create opportunities for employment and education, and pursue system and community change that fosters youth development. In doing so, they collectively develop a shared vision of what the world should look like, a

commitment to how individuals should be in the world, and collective and individual action to implement this vision and commitment.

For young people, participation in this process means making a commitment to engaging in transformational relationships with others that often catalyze the liberating yet painful process of arduous healing, learning, contributing, and personal change. For adults in engaged institutions - social workers, justice workers, youth workers, educators, community members and other allies - it also means making a relentless commitment to support the young people through engagement in transformational relationships - profound experiences and commitments that strike at the core of one's being. Genuine participation among adults in these transformational relationships often elicits the understanding that despite their best intentions, systems and institutions may in reality be failing their youth and that these adults, along with the institutions and youth, also may be in need of healing, growth, learning and change.

Via is not only comprehensive in its program objectives, but it is also fundamentally about building better relationships and collaboration among institutions. Serving only the most vulnerable youth, Via combines an integrated program model with the systemic change efforts of a collaboration of engaged institutions to create developmental and economic opportunities for youth who:

1) are street, gang and/or court involved;
2) have dropped out of high school and/or lack interest in life;
3) are young, overwhelmed parents facing multiple barriers; and/or
4) are refugees and immigrants struggling with language barriers, trauma, isolation and lack of supports.

These groups of young people are often unable to access and effectively participate in traditional programming in schools, adult basic education programs, job training programs, young parent programs, or other programs, and often need tremendous support in reaching a stage of readiness to participate in programming that will enable them to succeed in life.

Institutions as a Context for Young People in Crisis

Young people existing at the margins of society - youth living in high-risk environments, experiencing crisis due to substance abuse, violence, poverty, lack of education, or mental illness - have limited options, most of which are negative. Programs designed to serve the most high-risk youth are rare. Programs that address more than symptoms of crisis and effectively meet the myriad developmental needs of these young people are rarer still.

For many young people in crisis, life on the street is their only reality. Incarceration, institutionalization, or residential treatment programs are the lone options for ending their downward spiral. Institutions such as the juvenile justice system, social service systems, public education system, and public health services become dominant and significant

influences and often controlling factors in the young person's life. Yet for the most part, these programs have a single focus – such as substance abuse rehabilitation, adjudication, or mental health - and do not respond to what is needed most by the young person in order to sustain positive change: holistic developmental opportunities that facilitate the acquisition of the social, intrapersonal, educational, and employment skills required to become productive citizens.

While these programs and services may be supportive in removing the immediate negative influences the young person faces, such as a physical dependency on substance abuse, and thus be helpful in achieving short-term solutions, these approaches are often provided as a part of a discrete program or service of an agency. It is reasonable to expect that if a young person in crisis was able to access a coordinated and reinforcing pathway of programs, services, and supports, they would have a better chance of staying out of harm's way and beginning their journey to self sufficiency.

For young people in crisis, sustainable developmental results are found in community-centric programs that engage young people within the context of their lives and communities. These programs work on the individual level to build competence and resiliency and create opportunities for personal growth, education, and employment while at the same time working to improve the milieu of the young person's life.

Contextual change is seen primarily as a means of bolstering the achievement of individual outcomes and is accomplished through a variety of strategies. Because of the overarching impact of systems and institutions on the lives of these young people, system change work by youth advocates is often targeted to institutions in the social service and juvenile justice fields and is designed to increase the quality and effectiveness of services, and catalyze changes in other contextual factors specific to the needs of youth in crisis, such as housing, immigration reform and economic development.

Institutional Engagement as a Values-Based Strategy for Promoting the Development of Youth in Crisis

Roca has always been known as a persistent advocate for high-risk youth. Passion for and belief in the untapped potential of young people has constantly fueled Roca's fervor in doing everything possible to ensure that the young people it serves have every available opportunity to heal and succeed in life. Throughout much of Roca's 17 year history of observing the ongoing struggle of young people to access services and meet expectations of public institutions and systems, Roca's passion for change was often expressed in an adversarial way. Like many youth advocates, Roca's ways of work built on a framework of utilizing the skills of "power organizing" to elicit and advocate for change.

Power organizing is a common strategy used by youth advocates to shift power relations and create institutional or public policy change. Often deficit-focused, it is commonly expressed in some form of direct action or confrontation in opposition to a policy, practice, or belief of an institution or an individual. While it builds alliances among those

sharing similar views, power organizing pays little attention to understanding the experience or value of those it opposes. Advocates are known to stand up for and push for the rights and justice due marginalized people, delivering criticism wherever criticism is due.

Roca operated in this adversarial manner for many years. In fact, they became quite good at it, gaining a reputation for promoting youth voice and rights while calling public systems and community leadership onto the carpet when needed. Like all power organizing strategies, it was effective when Roca did its homework and had garnered the constituent support or strategic advantage to shift the balance of power. However, from the perspective of the targets of change, the strategy was far from positive. As one law enforcement leader describes it, "they (Roca staff) were a pain in the ass."

The adversarial relationship Roca built with the police department, city management, juvenile justice system, and human service agencies fostered mistrust, lack of understanding and hostility. At one point in time Roca was incorrectly perceived by public officials and law enforcement to be "the gang house;" a place that supported gang behavior and would shelter gang members in trouble with the law. While this perception was far from the truth, many in community leadership operated as if this were the reality because there was no trust or avenue for meaningful two-way communication among Roca and public institutions.

This adversarial role for a youth agency in marginalized or oppressed communities is not uncommon. It is often perceived as an important way to promote social justice, especially in regard to the issues of juvenile justice reform and police brutality where community-based youth agencies can play a significant role in catalyzing system reform through the engagement of staff and youth in promoting a voice and direct action for change. What is unique is that as an agency, Roca came to the realization that its adversarial approach was inconsistent with its core values of belonging, generosity, competence and independence, and Roca made a commitment to live their values by working in a much different way.

The transformational shift to fully living and expressing the organizational values was not an easy one. Roca staff who were highly skilled adversarial advocates had to develop new communication skills and could no longer use public officials as objects upon which they could vent their anger, stress, and frustration. Staff had to learn to develop compassion and understanding for their colleagues in other agencies, while exercising extraordinary patience as they struggled to live their values, a change that often went unnoticed or was not believed by others for quite a long time. Likewise at the organizational level, Roca had to build a sense of transparency, open communication, and accountability. Similarly, the players on the other side of the equation - the public officials and staff of the public systems and institutions - needed to develop new communication skills, learn to perceive Roca in a different manner and, most importantly, begin to build the internal motivations to hold themselves and their agencies accountable for their actions.

The mutual commitment to open, honest communication is common and a core element of collaborative efforts. Accountability for results is also a core element of successful collaboration, but both elements are often focused to specific project goals or efforts. What is remarkable about the commitment to accountability of Roca and its partner agencies is that it was initiated without a focus on any specific collaborative project or shared effort but rather at the individual level among colleagues based on individual actions, much in the same way one might hold a friend or family member accountable for their own behavior. The institutional commitment to accountability was also an internal one focused not to shared effort but rather to institutional behavior on a broader scale. This was pivotal. Collaboration is usually focused to a commitment to share and achieve specific goals usually manifesting in a project. However, as others began to see and experience the commitment of Roca staff to change their own personal behavior and act in the best way possible, relationships and perceptions began to change. Roca's values-based approach to organizational and individual behavior had totally shifted the paradigm. The commitment was not to accountability for a specific collaborative project, but to personal and institutional communication and behavior. The Engaged Institutions strategy had begun.

The Engaged Institutions Strategy

Roca's Engaged Institutions (EI) strategy is about ensuring that young people in crisis and their families have a genuine voice in institutions and that their needs are being met. This is particularly important for Roca's clientele because it serves the highest risk young people and their families, namely, youth in crisis. Institutions such as the social service system, youth parole boards, and juvenile detention systems have a major effect on the lives of these young people and their families. In essence, these institutions become the primary context of these young people's lives.

At the most fundamental level, Roca's EI strategy is about voice: young people's voice in participating in and shaping the services of the institutions impacting their lives; Roca's voice in sharing information and experience that increases the partner institution's ability to provide effective services; the partner institution's voice in communicating its needs and opportunities; and the collective voice of young people, Roca, and partner institutions that build shared institutional commitment, common vision, shared individual and institutional accountability, and an informal yet integrated system designed to provide optimal services and opportunities for young people in crisis.

For many of Roca's partners in engaged institutions, the experience of participating with young people in one of Roca's peacemaking circles provided them with their first opportunity to listen deeply to the voice and experience of young people. The circles provided a safe context for the youth and adults to speak from the heart, listen intently and begin to form shared understandings of the experiences and realities of young people's lives. As a result of this understanding at the individual level, the institutional partners began to understand that at the organizational level Roca had an incredible depth of knowledge of the experiences and emotional perceptions of the young people it served. Thus at the organizational level Roca emerged as a trusted source of youth voice.

The purpose of this strategy is to ensure that the systems and institutions contribute to young people's self-sufficiency and help them to be out of harm's way. Roca's work with institutions is focused to three outcomes: increasing the ability of institutions to 1) understand and be more responsive to youth needs, 2) be accountable for the services that they provide and 3) understand the impact they are having on young people's lives. Roca does this by being in relationship and partnership with the other institutions — at both the institutional and staff levels, promoting the opportunity for human development among Roca staff and their colleagues in the other agencies; at the organizational level through mutual engagement of organizational systems and supports; and at the community and policy level by strengthening public will and support for the work of the partner agency and most importantly for those they serve, the young people and their families.

As a values-based organization, Roca makes an intensive effort to create organizational practices and individual behaviors that align with the core values of belonging, generosity, independence, and competence. In the EI strategy, Roca's values are actualized as follows:

Belonging: By definition, the institutions are bonded together by geographic sense of community. Agencies are drawn together by geographic jurisdiction; unfortunately, this brings little, if any, inherent sense of unity or cohesion as often the agency is a local division of a larger agency and many staff of the partner institutions do not identify as members of the geographic community. Through the EI strategy, Roca works to create a virtual community that promotes the understanding that we are all in this together - agencies, staff, youth - all of those who interact in the circle of a young person's life. Roca creates a shared sense of participation and community for and with that young person.

Generosity: In the Engaged Institutions strategy, the value of generosity is expressed as the ability of Roca as an organization to recognize the multitude of their institutional gifts that can be shared. These range from knowledge (about the young person and the young person's life); relentless commitment to young people; skills in supporting the young people; openness and transparency about their agencies with others; being willing to explore new possibilities; being forthcoming about agency intentions; seeking feedback and focusing to results; and not being confined by boundaries and assumptions.

Competence: For Roca the EI strategy is focused to expression of their own organizational competence through striving for strong systems for organizational accountability at all levels, including fiscal, staffing, and programmatic; being a learning organization and drawing others into the circle that informs Roca; and inspiring other organizations, like themselves, to do better.

Independence: Independence in the engaged institutions context is about creating a healthy organization, and living the mission, vision, and values with efficiency. The concept of independence is linked to interdependence and belonging, and is

focused as it is with individuals being out of harm's way. At the organizational level the concept of being out of harm's way is very straightforward - as long as an organization is effective, contributing to society and realizing its mission, it needs to create systems and practices that will allow it to thrive. Conversely, if other organizations can more effectively provide the services, if the organization duplicates the efforts of others, or if it is ineffective, then is should not exist.

Everyone at Roca—from the Executive Director to entry-level staff—participates in relationships with colleagues at the various engaged institutions. This is not only helpful at each of the traditional levels of collaboration (e.g. communication: when a young person misses a required drug test, the agency can call Roca and they will find that person and bring them in), but also at the affective levels of the new paradigm of engagement where staff members now have a community of colleagues beyond the circle of their own institution who will engage with them, providing mutual support, open and honest communication, and will hold them and their agency accountable for their intentions, actions, and results.

Promising Practices of the Engaged Institutions Strategy

Roca's work in the Engaged Institutions strategy has been successful in developing a climate of shared values among staff in partner agencies as well as a culture of shared practices. The actual impact of some of these strategies should be measured in an evaluative process; however, initial feedback from staff and partners indicate the emergence of the following promising practices:

Role of Circles
Roca's practice of peacemaking circles is often cited by Roca staff and agency partners as a catalyst for institutional engagement. Originally intended to be a programmatic method for young people that promoted personal learning, healing, accountability, and community building, the circle methodology quickly expanded to become not only a core programmatic method, but also an internal organizational development tool for Roca. As Roca staff participated in circles, they began to realize that their own personal behavior as well as the collective organizational behavior of Roca needed to change. As staff of other agencies began to participate in circles, they quickly saw the application to their own life and work and asked Roca to provide additional training in how to conduct circles in their organization. Most importantly, however, Roca staff and partners began to model the values and principles of the circles outside of the environment of the circle. Through their role modeling and support they encouraged others who may not have had the opportunity to participate in a circle to act in a better way.

The circle process has opened many doors for Roca by

1) creating opportunities for colleagues from other agencies to observe Roca staff and youth operating from a values-based orientation,
2) providing Roca the opportunity to live the value of generosity by conducting in-service training on circles for staff of other agencies

3) fostering open communication, organizational transparency, and accountability at the institutional and individual level, and
4) serving as a constant source of reflection and learning for Roca staff and youth.

Through the use of circles, and Roca's commitment to living their core values in the engaged institutions strategy, Roca has been consistent in saying to other agencies, "How can we help you?" This therefore creates transformational relationships with other agencies that allow the young person to have another chance, while both agencies mutually hold the youth as well as themselves accountable and support growth and development for the youth, staff, and the agency.

Communication
Formal and informal communication structures have been established at the individual and organizational levels. Roca staff members have established regular times to check in with their colleagues in partner agencies. Cell phone numbers of Roca's outreach workers are readily available to staff in other agencies - and are often used. Agency representatives participate in Roca's internal visioning and planning processes.

Truth telling
A culture of commitment to truth telling, no matter what the perceived impact may be on the individual or their agency, has been established. This builds a sense of trust and patterns of communication that enable deep levels of meaning and understanding to emerge. When participating in circle, there is a mutual expectation that everyone will speak from the heart. This enables the harder issues and difficult conversations to emerge in a supportive, non-judgmental environment.

Transparency
Forthright communication and organizational transparency build trust and commitment. Roca has made an extra effort to ensure that all partners have access to information regarding how decisions were made, organizational intentions, and plans for the future. Equally important, colleagues in partner agencies are involved in a wide variety of Roca's reflection and evaluation processes including 360-degree staff assessments, program evaluation and strategic planning. Roca staff members are encouraged to publicly admit mistakes and seek feedback from others.

Lessons

The highly successful engaged institution strategy of Roca has also provided critical lessons. Roca is increasingly able to work with partners, leverage resources, and impact formal and informal policies and procedures. Transitioning from what might be considered an antagonistic role to a more collaborative role, Roca is enjoying an unprecedented level of community and institutional support and partnership that keeps growing. Three specific themes regarding lessons learned from Roca staff and partners regarding this work are as follows:

1) Open, honest, clear communication builds trust across agencies,

2) Clear communication of intentions to partners builds success, and
3) Clear institutional focus and programmatic intent has helped to engage institutions.

Issues and Challenges Inherent in the Engaged Institution Strategy

As an emerging strategy, the work of engaging institutions is not fully understood. Specific issues that need additional work or resolution include the following:

1) Is engaging institutions a means to an end or an end in itself? How can this work be positioned so that it can be easily understood, clearly documented, and achieve the most impact? How do you best connect the engaged institutions efforts to outcomes?

2) How do you quantify, analyze and justify the resource intensive nature of the work? How do you document costs, benefits, and develop sustainable resource streams to support these crucial efforts?

Recommended Next Steps

This paper provided the first overview and initial documentation of Roca's engaged institutions efforts. This is an extremely promising and novel practice that has the potential to greatly expand understanding of the foundational assumptions regarding the purpose, role and approach of institutional collaboration. An integrated approach to reflection, evaluation and learning from the work of engaged institutions would serve to improve and inform Roca's core practices as well as build new theory and knowledge for the field. Following are recommended next steps:

1) Document the important activities of the Engaged Institutions strategy, how they are performed, by whom, and what resources are needed.
2) Identify strategies for building the skills to improve the work of EI, including how to share this with the field of youth development
3) Create a theory of change for the EI strategy and identify how to tie the work of EI to youth outcomes and evaluation systems.
4) Develop case studies among key institutions, such as Department of Social Services, police, City of Chelsea, and Chelsea schools, that identify tipping points and the steps to building critical mass.
5) Conduct a theory-producing analysis: what does it take to get to the tipping point, and how do we become more intentional about getting more quickly to the tipping points?
6) Conduct a cost-benefit analysis, answering the questions: What is the realistic percentage of work that should be directed to systems? How can Roca make the case for investing in this strategy to funders?
7) Document how the EI work applies in different levels of organizations.
8) Use the results of the case study to develop practical tools for the field and a staff development guide for Roca and partner agencies that will build the concrete skills needed by staff to participate in engaged institutions work.

9) Begin the planning process for an outcome evaluation of the Engaged Institutions strategy that will identify the demographic trends of who is engaged, the impact of different approaches to engagement, entry points for different demographic groups and types of agencies, and documentation of impact at the organizational and individual levels.

10) Create reflection and documentation opportunities to address the following remaining questions:

- What is institutional engagement in Roca's context? How is it similar or different from other institutional relationships and collaborations?

- What is the development pattern for an institutional engagement relationship? What are the indicators that the relationship is moving from the traditional forms of collaboration, communication, and cooperation to bi-directional institutional engagement? What are the tactics for moving the relationship deeper?

- How do the efforts of institutional engagement contribute to the desired outcomes of/for young people?

- What is the influence of EI on Roca's mission, vision, strategies, program and culture?

- What organizational structures and supports exist to support EI?

- What additional development is needed to continue to facilitate the growth of an EI strategy?

Conclusion

Institutional collaboration is a tricky business. There are multiple agency agendas to be addressed and often negative past experience with collaboration to be overcome while building new relationships with people who may operate with very different world views or within very different organizational climates. At the onset of relationship building with Roca staff, the partner agency staff people were wary, asking themselves, "What do they what? Is this yet another advocate here to criticize, chastise or demand something of me?" This mindset evolved as trust was built and the motivations of the Roca staff became clear. Likewise, the intentions of the partner agency staff became clear to Roca staff. Now the trusting relationships between agency staff are mentioned regularly as a powerful attractor for this work.

The importance of choice is built into Roca's culture. Youth workers help young people to understand that they make choices every day and by making choices, one also chooses consequences. For example, a young person that makes a choice to sell drugs also makes

the choice to accepting the consequences of that action. As is often said at Roca, "As long as you blame others, you are a prisoner of your own making."

This is the message that Roca staff who work with youth stress. However, as an organization, Roca has not always lived this message. In the past, Roca, like many advocacy agencies, blamed institutions and others for the problems in the communities and approached institutions such as social services as an adversary rather than a potential partner. Yet when Roca began to deliberately explore and appreciate the link between their shared goals of helping young people behave in a different way, they understood their own need to behave differently, and they understood that the concept that individuals have a choice cuts across youth, staff, and institutions.

Once Roca stopped approaching other organizations and systems as objects to be fought, changed, or villainized, the door opened for the positive and promising work of engaged institutions. People across agencies were able to realize and create strategies to work towards their common goals. Efforts were made for everyone to do better in the work and build an ongoing commitment to act differently, to be in a better way.

This approach of "showing up differently" elicits a much different result than just telling others that they need to change. This approach is the key to it all. For Roca, this shift meant approaching their work on behalf of at-risk young people not as advocates but as partners. For staff in public institutions, it meant viewing Roca differently, as well as re-examining their own view of their role as agents of change.

There are many tangible and intangible results of the Engaging Institutions strategy that are beginning to emerge. Specifically:

1) ***Roca is a better organization.*** Roca staff members have reported that Roca is more accountable and more transparent to its partners and stakeholders. They cite the organization's expanded capacity to serve young people and the improved listening skills of staff as indicators of a stronger, better, more effective organization.

2) ***Young people have better access to services***. For example the Department of Social Services (DSS) is now using circles in the Chelsea regional office. Roca caseworkers have regularly scheduled meeting with DSS caseworkers. During a typical visit of a Roca caseworker to the DSS office, many DSS staff will stop her as she walks through the halls to her standing meeting with the area director, communicating information about young people Roca serves and seeking advice. Roca now has an open enrollment agreement with DSS and will take any young person—no questions asked— that DSS refers. DSS now requires that all their case workers go to Roca for circles training.

3) ***There has been a shift in informal and formal structures.*** For example the Chelsea city manager has provided leadership to the Metropolitan Mayor's

coalition in establishing a major public safety platform and funding that embraced Roca's prevention and intervention methods as a core strategy.

4) ***Better outcomes for youth through engagement in partner systems.*** The alignment of a common vision and commitment to do better for and with young people has created new understandings and opportunities for action. For example, the police department when working with a young person in trouble no longer perceives them simply as a "bad kid" but makes the effort to understand what drives the bad behavior- which in many cases is the need for a job.

In the case of the school system, Roca's EI strategy has provided educational institutions an unique opportunity where they can truly leave no child behind by establishing the model of alternative suspension. In this model, young people who are no longer able to learn in the context of schools are placed in alternative suspension at Roca where they receive school sponsored tutoring, participate in circles and have access to Roca's other programs and services. As a result of this program school administrators report the expulsion rate has been reduced to zero.

Engaging institutions shifts the systemic context in which young people receive services. It focuses to building a shared community of service providers who engage together in building positive solutions instead of a simple suppression strategy of the past (e.g. "do not do any more bad things"). Simply put, it requires similar levels of change and commitment that are required of young people and families. The results demonstrate that we cannot afford to ask for less.

Roca's Theory of Change is that: young people thrive and lead change when they understand, practice, and live the values of **BELONGING, GENEROSITY, COMPETENCE, and INDEPENDENCE**. Roca also is committed to engaging organizations, institutions and systems around these same values in order to provide real opportunities for young people to grow.

Our Values:

Belonging

What we <u>believe</u>:	Every young person counts
What we <u>think</u>:	Every young person needs to understand that they have a place in the world and that they matter
What we <u>do</u>:	We welcome people and we bring people together
What is the <u>evidence</u>:	Young people show up

Generosity

What we <u>believe</u>:	Every young person has a purpose
What we <u>think</u>:	Every young person needs to understand that they have something to give
What we <u>do</u>:	We teach and encourage young people to share and give
What is the <u>evidence</u>:	Young people help each other and their communities

Competence

What we <u>believe</u>:	Physical, mental, emotional, and spiritual development is important for all people
What we <u>think</u>:	Every young person has the capacity to learn and to make positive choices
What we <u>do</u>:	"Each one teach one" – Young people learn skills, share them and teach them.
What is the <u>evidence</u>:	Young people move from point A to point B in their lives – Young people participate in and improve their lives in the areas of education, employment and life skills

Independence

What we <u>believe</u>:	Changing and growing are part of a life long process
What we <u>think</u>:	Every young person has the capacity to live out of harm's way and become self-sufficient.
What we <u>do</u>:	We help people develop and act on growth plans, have visions for their lives and be hopeful for their futures
What is the <u>evidence</u>:	Young people graduate from Roca programs, youth can demonstrate a commitment to their own growth, and young adults are on the path to employment

In order to help youth and young adults understand, practice and live these values…we use the strategies of:

- **relentless street work and outreach** to meet people where they are and to connect and build trust;
- **transformational relationships** which promote mutual change through an intentional commitment to one's own and another's growth and development;
- **peacemaking circles** that promote personal learning, healing, accountability, and community building;
- **creating opportunities for education, employment and civic participation** that are the means for achieving self-sufficiency and community involvement; and
- **engaging institutions** to increase the collective work capacity of Roca, social service, educational, criminal justice, health, employment, and other community partners to achieve positive outcomes for young people and their communities.