Evaluation of the Strong Cities, Strong Communities (SC2) Teams Pilot

Federal Role in Revitalizing Distressed Cities: Interagency Collaboration and Local Partnerships

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1. Introduction

The federal government has historically invested significant resources in the nation's distressed cities. However, the benefits of these investments have often not been fully realized. Many of the most distressed cities have lacked the capacity to effectively use these resources and, in some cases, the segmented nature of the resources coming from the federal government has hindered the catalytic support federal programs might otherwise offer. The Strong Cities Strong Communities (SC2) Team pilot is an innovative effort to take on these challenges and develop a new approach for the federal government in revitalizing some of the most distressed cities in the U.S.

In September 2011, as part of SC2, the White House Domestic Policy Council and 14 federal agencies launched a pilot in six U.S. cities: Chester, Pennsylvania; Cleveland, Ohio; Detroit, Michigan; Fresno, California; Memphis, Tennessee; and New Orleans, Louisiana.[1] At the start of the pilot, federal agencies assigned employees to interagency teams of experts called SC2Teams.Each SC2 team was comprised of a team lead and federal employees assigned to work for the city either full-time, part-time, or in an advisory capacity. The federal teams included a small number of team members working on-site in the pilot cities as well as a larger number of team members based out of their agency's headquarters in the Washington, DC area or out of regional or field offices. The final evaluation report, *Evaluation of the Strong Cities, Strong Communities Team Pilot Initiative,* provides a more complete description of the pilot effort.

In 2012, the Department of Health and Human Services contracted with Abt Associates and Mt. Auburn Associates to evaluate the first 18 months of the SC2 pilot. The goals of this evaluation were to assess (1) how the activities of teams were implemented, (2) how participants experienced SC2, and (3) what has been learned that can be used to enhance future program implementation. To complement the main evaluation report and explore select topics in more detail, the study produced two select topics papers, of which this is one.

The purpose of this paper is to delve in much greater depth into two features that differentiate the SC2 pilot from other federal initiatives targeted toward distressed cities: first, having federal staff from multiple agencies collaborate on locally identified, project-specific work; and, second, its use of federal staff to foster new partnerships amongst local stakeholders.

While the research completed for the final evaluation report identifies examples of convening new partnerships and collaboration across federal agencies, this paper seeks to glean additional insights into the federal role in revitalizing distressed cities by exploring in greater detail the most notable examples of these two areas of activity. The paper addresses two research questions:

1) What determined when SC2 was able to increase coordination and collaboration among federal staff from multiple agencies and programs?

2) What contributed to SC2 Team's success when playing a convening role to facilitate local partnerships?

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[1] In October 2012, after the contract for this evaluation was executed, Youngstown, Ohio, also became an SC2 Team site.

The remainder of this paper is divided into three sections:

- Section 2 looks at the cases of significant federal interagency collaboration and identifies some of the lessons that emerged from these cases.

- Section 3 looks at the cases in which team members successfully convened formal local partnerships in the sites and identifies some of the lessons that emerged from these cases.

- Section 4 discusses some of the implications of the findings on interagency collaboration and partnerships for the federal role in revitalizing distressed communities and future SC2 work.

1.1   Methodology

In order to answer the two research questions, the team first developed the criteria for determining which activities at each of the sites should be examined as examples of collaboration among federal staff across agencies and efforts to facilitate local partnerships. The following is a description of the criteria, which emerged from the project's initial framing paper.[2]

> *Federal Interagency Collaboration:* In line with a 2012 GAO report, interagency collaboration was defined as "any joint activity that is intended to produce more public value than could be produced when the agencies act alone."[3] The focus was on how staff from multiple federal agencies collaborated in their work with pilot cities rather than collaboration between agencies in Washington, DC that occurred while designing and overseeing the SC2 initiative but was not tied to specific projects at the local level.

> *Local Partnerships:* This brief focuses only on partnerships or collaborations that involved a more formal structure with set membership, regular meetings, clearly defined leadership, and decision-making systems established to address a specific challenge or opportunity in the community since partnerships with these characteristics are more likely to result in enduring changes.

Using these definitions, the research team first reviewed all the existing data that had been assembled through the research for the larger evaluation report to identify activities that were interagency collaborations or local partnerships. This included interviews with key stakeholders during site visits in the spring of 2013, focus groups with team members, and multiple interviews with the team lead in each site. Follow-up phone conversations were held with the team leads to review the list and see if any additional examples could be identified from the first 18 months of implementation.

Based upon this process, and using the targeted definitions listed above, five cases were identified as examples of interagency collaboration, and three examples were found that illustrated the

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[2]   Mt. Auburn Associates and Abt Associates, *Evaluation of the Strong Cities, Strong Communities Pilot Initiative: Framing Paper*, January 2013.

[3]   Perhaps the most cited definition of interagency collaboration is from Bardach, *Getting Agencies to Work Together: The Practice and Theory of Managerial Craftsmanship* (1998), which defined collaboration as "any joint activity by two or more agencies working together that is intended to increase public value by their working together rather than separately." The 2012 GAO Report, *Managing for Results: Key Consideration for Implementing Interagency Collaborative Mechanisms* has drawn on Bardach's definition for its work.

establishment of more formalized local partnerships that were initiated by a team member and met the criteria established for this brief. These cases were:

- *Federal Interagency Collaboration*

    1. Guiding high speed rail in Fresno.

    2. Blending Community Development Block Grant (CDBG) funds with Department of Transportation-Federal Highway Administration (DOT-FHWA) funds in New Orleans.

    3. Advancing the vision for the Fulton Mall in Fresno.

    4. Establishing a Permanent Supportive Housing voucher preference for individuals returning from substance abuse treatment and incarceration in New Orleans.

    5. Jumpstarting an agriculture-based technology cluster in Fresno.

- *Local Partnerships*

    1. Healthy Chester Coalition in Chester, Pennsylvania.

    2. Strategic Workforce Alignment Group in Cleveland, Ohio.

    3. Building Neighborhood Capacity Program in Fresno, California.

The examples were chosen because they best exemplified the characteristic of the respective activity during the study's analysis period. While individual team members in all of the sites worked closely with city staff to address specific needs and also met with other team members periodically to plan and discuss their work, the cases selected as examples of federal interagency collaboration were ones in which the achievements were related specifically to the active collaboration of at least two different federal agencies. Similarly, it is important to note that in each of the sites there were many examples where team members convened meetings to discuss issues or where team members facilitated new relationships in the community, but, for the purposes of this brief, the selected local partnership examples demonstrated more formal activities that went beyond individual meetings or convenings.

The vision for the ad hoc papers did not anticipate substantial, if any, additional research. However, the evaluation team made a series of telephone calls to team members involved in some of these activities to fill in details about who was involved, how the work originated, and what elements of the process contributed to its success.

2. Enhancing Federal Interagency Collaboration

The following cases provide insight to the research question, "What determined when SC2 was able to increase coordination and collaboration among federal staff across multiple programs?" by highlighting how the need for or idea to coordinate across agencies emerged, who was involved in the effort, how they became engaged, and what was achieved.

2.1 Case Examples of Interagency Collaboration

2.1.1 Guiding High Speed Rail in Fresno

One component of the SC2 Team work plan in Fresno was to provide technical assistance to the city to conduct high speed rail (HSR) planning. Early in the SC2 pilot, team members noticed that there was not adequate coordination among the many entities involved in aspects of HSR planning. Fortunately, at about the same time, the California HSR Authority identified the need to collaborate across federal agencies on this project. A representative from the HSR Authority approached the city and a team member asking them to help facilitate this interagency coordination in order to kick-start the station area planning in Fresno. This request catalyzed the collaboration across agencies, which all had a joint interest in successfully stewarding the implementation of this first leg of the HSR line.

The assigned EPASC2 team member initiated and coordinated outreach to Washington, DC-based Department of Transportation Federal Transit Administration (DOT-FTA) staff members and a regional DOT staff member for guidance on the HSR infrastructure (e.g., track work, engineering, and public art elements). She also put together the daylong convening in April 2012, which included various Fresno city staff (i.e., planning staff, public works staff, engineering staff, city manager), various individuals from the state level (i.e., HSR Authority representatives, design consultants, and Strategic Growth Council representatives), and a number of federal staff (i.e., San Francisco-based EPA staff, HUD and DOT regional staff, and DOT-FTA staff from Washington, DC). The result was that the HSR Authority collected necessary input on the HSR infrastructure guidelines, and the city gathered the right information to issue an RFP to hire a consultant to lead its HSR station area master plan. Additionally, the daylong convening started a worthwhile relationship between the HSR Authority and the city of Fresno, using the EPA team member as an intermediary.

Under the Partnerships for Sustainable Communities (PSC), EPA, DOT, and HUD coordinate federal housing, transportation, water, and other infrastructure investments and policy to help regions and communities develop in a more resilient and sustainable manner.[4] The SC2 pilot helped to operationalize and implement interagency programs such as the PSC, through a place based effort in Fresno that engaged staff from the agencies in a different way, working on the ground in the community and focusing on a particular set of local issues. The team collaboration streamlined the process of collecting input from multiple agencies and provided each agency with the opportunity to offer its own input during the convening. The collaboration also provided a venue for the agencies to consider the perspectives of other agencies and other regulations pertinent to HSR. The team member ensured that the right agencies, both locally and in DC, were involved in the conversations. The team member was new to the area, with no previous interactions with or allegiance to any of the on-the-ground partners involved, and she had the bandwidth to spearhead this effort. Both these factors contributed to her ability to successfully facilitate interagency collaboration as a neutral broker.

The success of the HSR coordination has led the Fresno team members from multiple federal agencies including, but not limited to, DOT, EPA, and HUD, to explore how they can duplicate the successful collaboration in Fresno in other California regions that will be building HSR stations.

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[4]   http://www.sustainablecommunities.gov/aboutUs.html

2.1.2   Blending CDBG Funds with DOT-FHWA Funds in New Orleans

In New Orleans, HUD and DOT staff worked together to respond to conflicting requirements for handling local hiring preferences in trying to blend the use of CDBG funds with DOT-FHWA funds in order to complete a $4 million roadway project. CDBG funds require a hiring preference for low-income persons residing within the area in which the project is located, but DOT-FHWA funds require that contracts be awarded to the lowest bidder

New Orleans had sought a mechanism to blend the two funding sources for over a year-and-a-half without success and raised the issue with the SC2 team lead. The team lead, who represented HUD, contacted leadership at both HUD and DOT and learned that DOT had already developed a solution to this inconsistency and had been seeking to pilot the solution on the ground for over two years. The SC2 team lead coordinated the implementation of the solution in New Orleans, leading to a cooperative agreement to use a ratio of one CDBG dollar for every nine FHWA dollars under the CDBG regulations. The team member's understanding of the regulatory issues and connections to leaders within HUD and DOT made identifying and implementing this solution possible.

Because this solution succeeded in New Orleans, other cities have a model for blending the use of CDBG and DOT-FHWA funds into one contract.

2.1.3   Advancing the Vision for the Fulton Mall in Fresno

In Fresno, advancing the vision for redeveloping the moribund downtown Fulton Mall was a major priority for the mayor and constituted a large component of the SC2 pilot work. As the work evolved, it became clear that to achieve the vision and leverage existing federal investments in the strategy, collaboration was needed across the large number of federal agencies involved: EPA, FHWA, DOT, the Small Business Administration (SBA), the Office of the Chief Information Officer (OCIO) of the Department of Energy (DOE), the General Services Administration (GSA), and HUD.

At the outset of SC2, team members from various agencies were responsive as issues with the Fulton Mall projects surfaced, and they each worked to solve problems that were related to requirements and programs specific to their own agency. However, it became clear that no single agency had the solution to these complex problems, which involved historic preservation, conflicts between optimal land uses and prioritizing congestion relief, and balancing economic development priorities with transportation planning.

Recognizing this complexity, team members were committed to working together to carry out the mayor's vision, especially as they learned of the multitude of federal investments in the area. The FTA had an investment in the bus rapid transit line. DOT had an investment in the HSR station a mere two blocks from the mall. HUD, EPA, and DOT had an investment in the region through the Sustainable Regional Planning Grant, much of the funding for which was directed to downtown planning. Understanding the numerous federal investments in the same land area made clear the need for coordination across agencies.

Though it took the team members a few months to understand the scope of the existing set of projects, they ultimately were able to see how they could align the various investments. Each agency played a fairly distinct role in working to advance the vision of the Fulton Mall. The FHWA representative was the point person for all of DOT and, ultimately, the grantor of the 2013 Transportation Investment Generating Economic Recovery (TIGER) funding for Fulton Mall. EPA's Office of

Sustainable Communities was also very involved in the Fulton Mall area work, funding technical assistance to assess the opportunities for anchor institutions to locate in the city, and specifically in the Fulton Mall, and funding and staffing an infill development task force to accelerate redevelopment in downtown and the Fulton Mall area.

Interagency collaboration was critical to optimizing the use of federal dollars in the Fulton Mall area. Team members from many of these agencies helped uncover additional resources and identified potential federal grant opportunities in an effort to connect various elements of Fulton Mall planning to a larger vision for downtown revitalization. With federal staff focused on the same vision, they were better able to see what other projects and investments were necessary and thus able to direct city staff to pursue appropriate funding for those projects. Even agencies that did not have investments directly in the Fulton Mall area kept up-to-date on project progress with those who did to determine how to best leverage existing investment to attract other investment into the downtown area adjacent to the mall. There were several examples of the results of team member collaboration. First, the proposed bus rapid transit route was rerouted so as to touch the Fulton Mall and other major downtown areas. The Department of Agriculture (USDA) and the DOE OCIO sought to get broadband downtown as a way to lure new agricultural technology companies to the area. SBA made downtown its priority for small business development and training. Finally, GSA Region 9 joined the effort to revitalize Fulton Mall and agreed to stay in the downtown area after the end of its lease.

2.1.4 Establishing a Permanent Supportive Housing Voucher Preference for Individuals Returning from Substance Abuse Treatment and Incarceration in New Orleans

In New Orleans, the Department of Health and Human Services (HHS), the Department of Justice (DOJ), and HUD team members, together expanded the existing permanent supportive housing (PSH) voucher preference to include individuals with disabilities who had been incarcerated or were returning from substance abuse treatment. The three team members from different federal agencies designed and implemented the process needed to reach the targeted populations and help them apply for the vouchers.

After Hurricane Katrina, HUD issued PSH vouchers to the state of Louisiana to support vulnerable groups. Both the city and the State Office of Community Development wanted to expand eligibility for the vouchers in New Orleans to individuals with disabilities who were returning from prison or from substance abuse treatment. While changing the eligibility guidelines for the vouchers to include these populations was not a barrier, there was a limited amount of time left in which to use them. Thus, the major challenge that the state of Louisiana faced was putting a system in place in New Orleans for identifying individuals who could benefit from the vouchers and establishing the process for signing individuals up for the vouchers quickly.

Having team members from HUD, DOJ, and HHS who were working with the city proved critical to being able to address the challenges that the state was facing in implementing this effort. Even though the state of Louisiana had started working with the city on this process, the city had limited staff capacity and was, therefore, unable to respond quickly. In addition, the city's relationships with some of the organizations that would need to be engaged were strained. The state asked the team member from HHS to engage the team members from DOJ and HUD in the process and provide assistance.

The HHS member had worked to develop the city's behavioral health plan while the HUD representative worked in the HUD Choice neighborhoods, which were located in high-crime areas, and the DOJ member tried to address issues related to ex-offenders. It became evident that these three team members understood the populations that were the target of the vouchers and the many organizations in the city working with the targeted population. They were able to help the state develop tangible connections to the populations it was seeking to target with the vouchers by identifying the appropriate agencies working with the targeted population and convening the appropriate stakeholders from these agencies. The team members had worked with many of these agencies in the past and were able to convince them to work with the state on this effort. According to one of the team members, "People were willing to come to the table because we were there to provide support. A lot had to do with rapport, but it also had to do with the fact that we were federal employees. They were much more inclined to come when we extended the invitation."

The team members organized a meeting of agencies that were working with ex-offenders and individuals with mental health or substance abuse issues for the state to present how the vouchers worked and how to access them. Many in the room had been unaware of the vouchers at that time. The outcome of the convening was the designation of one person at each organization who would be trained by the state to go through the application process with clients and who would maintain the relationship with the state. The HUD team member convened two follow-up meetings.

This example of interagency collaboration highlights the ability for on-the-ground SC2 teams to collaboratively address emergent opportunities that surface while the SC2 teams are working with the city. The ability of the team members to move this effort forward quickly was directly related to being embedded in the city, having the relationships and expertise needed to ensure that the right organizations were at the table, and being seen by community partners as outside brokers with the credibility of federal agencies. The successful collaboration across agencies was also related to the informal and trusting relationships that the three team members built through being part of the SC2 team. As one member noted, "We were always able to agree on the approach. We trusted each other's judgment."

2.1.5   Jumpstarting an Agriculture-Based Technology Cluster in Fresno

In Fresno, a collaborative effort of USDA, DOE, the White House Office of Science and Technology Policy (OSTP), and the city of Fresno's CIO was able to advance the mayor's vision of connecting the regional agriculture sector to economic development through the creation of an ag-tech cluster. This focus emerged over the course of SC2 and could not have been predicted from the start. The interagency collaboration that advanced this work arose from unexpected connections between two federal staff members from different agencies (USDA and DOE) who knew each other only as a result of SC2.

Initially, Fresno's chief information officer (CIO) contacted the DOE OCIO team member in an effort to find resources for rural broadband. Based on this request, the DOE OCIO connected the Fresno CIO first with the USDA regional team member he had met through the SC2 pilot, and then later with research scientists at Lawrence Livermore National Laboratory and the University of California, Berkeley. The collaboration between DOE and USDA also encouraged individuals within at least two different USDA departments, USDA California Rural Development and the USDA Agriculture Research Service Pacific West, to coordinate their efforts and work effectively across departments in a new way.

Federal staff members played different roles in moving this work forward. The DOE team member made the initial connection between the city's CIO and the USDA team member, made additional connections to scientists and researchers at distinguished labs in California, and held monthly meetings by phone with those engaged in this effort. Establishing these connections catalyzed this work, while monthly meetings held parties accountable and kept the work moving forward. After these initial connections were made, the USDA team member worked full-time on this effort in tandem with the Fresno CIO who was working on the ground to develop relationships with various key stakeholders, share the vision and gain buy-in, and put together an agricultural technology showcase. A team member from OSTP was engaged on monthly calls, giving gravitas to the project and leading to more interest among partners.

Interagency collaborative efforts drove this work forward, and it all stemmed from the connections made between two team members from agencies that would not be seen as obvious partner agencies. As one team member stated, "But for SC2, none of the agencies or departments would have been talking to each other—particularly with the Department of Energy. The DOE OCIO is in headquarters in DC and rural USDA is in California—a 3,000 mile separation—they wouldn't have otherwise interacted."

The collaboration led to the city's first annual agricultural technology showcase at Fresno City Hall. During this showcase, researchers presented the technology-based agricultural products they had developed to venture capitalists and farmers. The federal team members and the Fresno CIO also worked to make broadband available in the downtown area so that ag-tech firms would have the necessary technological infrastructure to locate there once they obtained investor backing.

Federal agencies found this cross-agency collaboration so valuable and successful that USDA Rural Development, USDA Agriculture Research Service Pacific West, and the DOE OCIO signed a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) to formalize collaborative efforts beyond the length of SC2.

2.2   Interagency Collaboration: Findings

Increased collaboration among federal agencies working with pilot cities was one of the clear goals of the SC2 pilot. And, as seen in the cases cited, there have been some significant examples of positive outcomes that have been achieved as a result of cross-agency collaboration in the SC2 pilot sites. This cross-agency work is also leading to potential outcomes that are enduring both beyond the SC2 process and beyond the SC2 pilot sites:

- In Fresno, the cross-agency relationships established may be used in other communities along the high speed rail line.

- The blending of DOT and CDBG funding model from New Orleans is being promoted in other cities.

- In Fresno, USDA agencies and the DOE OCIO have signed an MOU to formalize collaborative efforts on an ongoing basis.

In the cases of Fresno and New Orleans, understanding why staff members from a variety of federal agencies were able to coordinate their efforts, collaborate to address barriers, and take advantage of opportunities provides insights into answering the research question, "What determined when SC2 was able to increase coordination and collaboration among federal staff from multiple agencies and

programs?" The findings also inform future federal efforts to revitalize distressed cities. Some of the lessons emerging from the cross-agency collaboration in these two cities are:

1. *Problem-solving across federal agencies to complete a real, on-the-ground project facilitates new ways of working and new collaborative relationships among federal staff from multiple agencies.* There have been many different approaches to interagency collaboration, many of which are outlined in the recent GAO report on interagency collaboration (2012). And, the current administration has developed numerous initiatives to promote increased collaboration across federal agencies, the SC2 initiative being one. The case examples provide evidence that the SC2 approach is somewhat unique. While most existing examples of cross-agency collaboration are occurring at the policy or funding level, team members from multiple agencies were able to collaborate on on-the-ground challenges that required a different type of problem solving. This indicates focusing on a specific location can be a naturally unifying factor for interagency collaboration.

2. *Most examples of cross-agency collaboration gradually emerged over the course of team members' involvement in the cities.* Few of the examples that site leads identified were in the initial work plan developed in each of the sites. This indicates it was difficult to anticipate where and how interagency collaboration would be required. The cases suggest that putting a team of interagency federal staff together through this SC2 structure lends itself well for emergent collaboration.

3. *Strong working relationships amongst the team members was very important and created an environment that often led to the identification of opportunities to work across agencies.* In some of the sites, the team members developed relatively strong, informal relationships. These relationships created a sense of trust that carried over when cross-agency issues arose. Moreover, by participating in a team made up of federal staff members from various agencies, team members were able to learn more about the work within these other agencies, and ultimately use one another as a resource when faced with issues that crossed agency boundaries. Through these relationships, some of the team members sought to engage their counterparts in other agencies when the city or state came to them with a problem or issue that it wanted the SC2 team to address.

4. *Engaging with the state is often important in efforts that seek to coordinate federal funding.* In a number of these cases, federal funding flowed through the state, not the city. In some cases, a state agency, not the city, initiated the request for federal assistance in addressing a challenge or opportunity. Thus, it is important to consider where and how federal funds are flowing into the city and that federal efforts to increase coordination will need to engage stakeholders at the state, county, and municipal levels.

5. *Collaborating across agencies is most likely to be needed where there are regulatory inconsistencies or in cases where there are multiple streams of federal investment in a specific place or related to a specific project.* The cases provide evidence that collaboration across federal agencies is most likely to occur where it is needed to either address a longstanding challenge or where coordinating federal resources can help to maximize public benefits. A clear implication is in developing the work plan for the sites, more attention could be given to identify the flow of federal funding into each city and any ongoing regulatory or funding challenges

related to this funding. Increased focus on targeting those areas where cross-agency collaboration is more likely to be required would take fuller advantage of some of the unique elements of the SC2 initiative.

3. Convening Local Partnerships

As mentioned in the introduction, a second element of the SC2 pilot that made effective use of federal staff was helping to create new partnerships in the pilot cities. These partnerships are distinct from those described in the previous section, which represented collaborations across federal agencies. The focus here is on team members facilitating new cross-stakeholder partnerships *within the city with local stakeholders* representing the public, private, and nonprofit sectors.

The following three cases highlight answers to the research question, "What contributed to SC2 teams' success when playing a convening role to facilitate local partnerships?" by examining how SC2 teams contributed to the formation of the partnership and how team members' role as federal staff influenced their ability to bring stakeholders together.

3.1 Case Examples of Local Partnerships

3.1.1 Healthy Chester Coalition

The Healthy Chester Coalition in Chester, Pennsylvania, is a forum that allows healthcare providers, community organizations, and public sector agencies to build relationships with one another and work together on projects that will lead to "better coordination of healthcare delivery and reduced costs due to improved efficiencies."[5] The Coalition originally formed, with guidance from the SC2 team, as a platform for connecting community- and faith-based organizations to the work other groups were doing around public health.

Public health was not an area of focus in Chester's initial SC2 assessment or at the beginning of implementation. However, early in the process, the city's Bureau of Health expressed an interest in expanding its role beyond that of a regulatory agency by creating a new Community Health Education Services Department to actively promote and encourage healthy lifestyles and behaviors.

In order to leverage existing resources in Chester and in coordination with the new department, the HHS team member began convening meetings among the Bureau of Health, healthcare providers, and community organizations. One city staff person mentioned, "The team member's position with the federal government brought more people to the meetings than when [the city health commissioner] called a meeting on her own," and, "The team member's presence reminded the city that the White House was looking at Chester."

Through this process, the SC2 team brokered new relationships, in particular, between Crozer-Keystone Health Systems and Widener University, two key anchor institutions in Chester. Other Coalition partners that long saw themselves as competitors began trusting each other and started sharing best practices. The meetings evolved into the Healthy Chester Coalition, which dedicated

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[5]   SC2 monthly report, July 2012.

itself to promoting partnerships to effectively and efficiently deliver healthcare and social services to the city.

The HHS team member's role in the Healthy Chester Coalition after the initial startup primarily involved providing technical assistance to the Coalition. For example, he helped a Widener University professor and students develop a resource guide that includes healthcare services and programs available in the city, and worked with Keystone Mercy Health Plan to secure a $10,000 grant to create a website for the resource guide that incorporates GIS mapping features.

The Coalition still meets regularly, on a biweekly basis, and has grown to include 45 to 60 organizations. In addition to providing a space to work on specific projects, it offers opportunities for training, networking, and sharing best practices. The group currently has three priority areas: 1) increase access to care; 2) develop public health outreach strategies; and 3) coordinate community health fairs.

3.1.2 Strategic Workforce Alignment Group

The Strategic Workforce Alignment Group (SWAG) in Cleveland, Ohio, is a partnership created "to develop an approach for the Workforce Investment Board (WIB) to improve the alignment of workforce employment, training, and education programs with the needs of employers for skilled workers."[6] The Department of Labor team member assigned to Cleveland spearheaded the initial effort that led to the formation of SWAG in response to the city's desire for a more effective workforce system.

The workforce system was one of the focus areas that emerged from Cleveland's SC2 assessment, which suggested that there was a need for better alignment with other strategies, such as economic development and technical education, and suggested that because the city did not have dedicated staff working on these issues, a federal team could play a critical role in helping the city work across the education, workforce, and economic development silos. The SC2 2012 work plan reflected these recommendations.

The Cleveland/Cuyahoga County WIB hired a new director in June 2011, providing an opportunity for new thinking and new leadership. Three months later, the full-time DOL team member relocated to the city and her new office was four doors away from the WIB director. Their proximity and shared interest provided an opportunity for the two to work together closely on finding new ways to address workforce challenges. Soon, the director and other WIB members began to tap the team member for ideas about how to proceed with their strategic planning efforts. The first step of their plan for moving forward was to have the team member meet with 30 to 40 organizations to discuss challenges and opportunities in the workforce system and to better understand how the system worked. This process of engaging community stakeholders allowed the DOL team member to raise awareness of the WIB's strategic planning effort and also helped build a sense of shared ownership of the problem and solution.

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[6]   Strategic Workforce Alignment Group (SWAG) (2013). *Building a Competitive Workforce: Final Report*. Retrieved from http://www.employmentconnection.us/pdf_employmentconnection/en-US/BuildingaCompetitiveWorkforce-FINALRPRT_031513.pdf.

After the team member presented her findings to the WIB, the WIB members decided to create a new WIB subcommittee to further investigate possible strategies to address the issues that were raised. The subcommittee was named SWAG, and the WIB approved it in May 2012. From there, the team member took the lead in bringing together partners, including some from beyond the WIB membership, to serve on the subcommittee. These partners were selected based on their ability to work together and were tasked to find practical solutions within a six-month timeframe.

SWAG included about 20 representatives from the public and nonprofit sectors as well as some trade associations. After meeting on a monthly schedule during the six month exploration period, SWAG issued its final report on practical solutions in March 2013. The report, *Building a Competitive Workforce,* presented specific measurable strategies to address three types of workforce gaps (information gaps, skill gaps, and location mismatches).

Although the team member had extensive knowledge of federal workforce policies as a result of having held leadership positions in many of DOL's agencies, interviews suggest that her current position as a federal employee was not a requirement for her success. Her role at the federal government and connection to SC2 did lend credibility to the WIB's workforce efforts, and organizations were more interested in joining the effort when they heard she was involved, but those interviewed credited her knowledge of national initiatives, experience managing processes and facilitating groups, willingness to try new tactics and solve complex problems, and ability to ask questions without preconceived opinions as more important to spearheading the creation of the partnership than her position as a federal employee.

Although SWAG was initially created as a task force to develop a plan, the partnership decided to continue meeting and is now focused on implementing its recommendations.

3.1.3   Fresno Building Neighborhood Capacity Program

In August 2012, a cross-sector group led by the city of Fresno was selected to participate in the Building Neighborhood Capacity Program (BNCP), a federal program that provides targeted technical assistance to build capacity in distressed neighborhoods to "collectively solve problems, identify access and leverage existing resources, and put improvements in place."[7] BNCP called for applicants to form a broad-based partnership, and the cross-sector group that had been brought together by the embedded HUD team member was instrumental in applying for and then implementing the program in Fresno. The capacity-building and technical assistance activities provided through BNCP supported neighborhood revitalization efforts in two low-income city neighborhoods, El Dorado Park and Southwest.

At the time of the SC2 assessment, Fresno had developed a promising approach to neighborhood stabilization in its Lowell neighborhood. The assessment included a recommendation that the city apply similar strategies to other high-poverty neighborhoods. The team member explored options for moving this work forward; it identified the BNCP grant as a timely opportunity. City leadership eventually decided to pursue being part of the program because they placed a high degree of trust in the HUD team member's recommendations and also recognized the value of her strategic planning expertise. Once the decision to submit a proposal was made, it was necessary to bring community

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[7]   http://www.justice.gov/opa/pr/2011/June/11-ojp-783.html

partners and matching grant funders on board. This involved holding conversations with representatives of community groups and philanthropic organizations to describe how the program would benefit their communities and resolving disagreements that arose. Stakeholders in Fresno credited the team member's involvement as important to attracting organizations that might not otherwise have attended the meetings.

After Fresno was selected as a BNCP community, the cross-sector partnership created to apply for the program continued to meet in order to oversee the work. Now that implementation is well underway, Fresno is documenting successful practices and working to institutionalize the lessons learned. Fresno has also been offered the opportunity to expand BNCP activities to a third neighborhood.

3.2   Facilitating Local Partnerships: Findings

In looking at the models where team members helped to catalyze new partnerships in the community, there are two types of lessons that are relevant to informing the federal government's role in revitalizing distressed cities. There are the general lessons about creating new cross-sector partnerships, and, of more relevance to the SC2 effort, there are lessons that relate to the particular role that a federal SC2 staff member can play in creating new partnerships in a community:

1. *An individual from outside the community bringing stakeholders together can be more effective than a local stakeholder.* In all three examples, the team members catalyzed movement to bring stakeholders together and were credited with overcoming historic resistance. As people new to the city, the SC2 teams could question established activities and policies and were not as personally invested in the existing relationships as others who work in the city may have been.

2. *The skills and experience of the convener are important to being able to bring the right stakeholders together and facilitate the process.* The seniority of the team member leading this work and the alignment of that member's previous experience to the area of work of the partnership varied in the three examples above. For example, the team member responsible for bringing the Healthy Chester Coalition together did not have public health expertise, but his years of experience in federal customer service improvement and intergovernmental initiatives and his ability to make connections to resources and technical assistance providers were valuable to his success. In the Cleveland example, partnership stakeholders credited the team member's credibility and approach as the most critical elements of her success in bringing a diverse group together rather than her subject expertise or seniority.

3. *Understanding the local context and establishing trust with local stakeholders are critical before convening any group or asking anyone to be involved.* Taking the time to develop relationships with key stakeholders in the community and to learn community needs, building trust among potential partners, and identifying how the work of the partnership can benefit stakeholders' goals are important foundational elements of a successful partnership. Multiple local stakeholders in SC2 cities commented on the SC2 team's ability to understand the local context and build trusted relationships with the community as a contributing factor in the SC2 team's success in convening partnerships.

4. *Having federal employees, especially from a White House Initiative, make the requests for local stakeholders to join local partnerships provided gravitas and energy to the effort.* Local stakeholders were often motivated to participate in an initiative that they might not otherwise

have responded to because a federal employee led the charge. Whether stakeholders attended in the belief that they might gain access to federal resources, a more direct connection to federal staff, or some other advantage, having federal staff catalyze a new initiative can make the difference in advancing an idea. Additionally, the mere presence of federal employees often lent interest to work associated with the SC2 pilot.

4. Conclusion: Effective Roles of the Federal Government in Revitalizing Distressed Cities

In conclusion, the SC2 pilot led to both effective interagency collaboration and local partnerships in many of the targeted communities, and this type of work has the potential to have enduring impacts not only in the city where the work occurs, but also in other distressed communities. This final section draws from all the case examples throughout this brief to highlight lessons related to the roles federal staff members can play to have effective, longer-term impacts in revitalizing distressed communities:

- *Helping to establish new formal partnerships in a community can lead to enduring changes beyond the duration of the intervention.* With relatively limited investment in staff time, the team members in the SC2 cities were able to catalyze new ways of working in these communities. This was seen in Cleveland's Strategic Workforce Alignment Group, the Healthy Chester Coalition, the partnership formed through the Building Neighborhood Capacity Program, and the Agriculture-based Technology Cluster in Fresno.

- *Working in partnership with cities through on-the-ground projects and places can help to resolve contradictory or duplicative regulations in different federal programs.* Once resolved in one location, these changes can then be replicated and used nationally as seen in the New Orleans HUD/DOT example.

- *Creating new relationships among staff in various federal agencies can spark further collaborative efforts beyond the pilot sites.* In the case of Fresno, the collaboration across the federal agencies was so successful that the individuals involved aim to take their approach and use it in other places— as seen in the Fresno high speed rail example where the team intends to replicate its work in other high speed rail regions around the state.

In all of the examples examined more thoroughly in this brief, examples of both interagency collaboration and local partnerships, federal staff brought relevant knowledge and connections, power and gravitas, and the ability to serve as a neutral broker. However, some of these characteristics are present in other federal efforts to revitalize distressed cities. For example, federal funds are often used to hire outside consultants to work with cities or specialized technical assistance providers are brought in by federal agencies. Such individuals could have an equally positive impact on revitalizing distressed cities if they were hired to perform similar tasks. The analysis of the examples in this brief provide some insights into when it may be particularly crucial to have *federal* staff play this role and where the structure of the SC2 team provides additional benefits:

- When the problem faced by a city or state involves complex regulatory issues that cut across different federal agencies;

- When several federal agencies are investing in the same area and increased efficiencies could come from cross-agency coordination; and

- When the gravitas of a federal initiative and federal staff could be helpful in convening local partners and helping them to overcome barriers that have limited successful collaboration in the past.

There are opportunities to further encourage interagency collaboration and local partnerships that could have enduring impacts on economic growth in SC2 cities. Specifically, as implementation of Phase II of SC2 begins, the following could be considered:

- To promote interagency collaboration, the federal government could prioritize those projects that would benefit most from a cross-agency effort. This could involve explicitly setting criteria that SC2 teams give priority to addressing problems related to regulatory barriers involving more than one federal agency, or to strategies that involve multiple federal investments. This takes advantage of the unique role these SC2 teams play as federal employees.

- Initial work could be undertaken to map out the flow of the federal dollars in each of the targeted communities. This work might identify state agencies that could be engaged as well as which federal agencies might be relevant to the work in that city.

- The SC2 Council might ask the cities to specifically identify areas in which the lack of coordination across federal agencies may be impeding the city's work. The SC2 teams could make it a priority to explore resolution of some of these issues.

- Team members could have some additional training in building cross-stakeholder partnerships and facilitating meetings. Team members with these skills and interests were very effective at building new partnerships in their communities.

- Increased effort could be made to encourage informal relationship and team building among the team members in a particular location. These relationships help to build trust and facilitate increased opportunities for cross-agency coordination around issues or opportunities that emerge over the course of the work.