EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

FINAL EVALUATION REPORT ON THE

ENII LEARNING COMMUNITY ORGANIZATIONS

JANUARY 2006 THROUGH DECEMBER 2007

OMNI

The Denver Metropolitan Area is a racially and ethnically diverse geographic, political, cultural and economic center of the Rocky Mountain region. In 2000, the U.S. Census reported that white Americans represented only a slight majority (nearly 52%) of the city of Denver's population and that with projected population growth among Asian Americans and Latinos/Hispanics further diversification of the population was anticipated over time. The Expanding Nonprofit Inclusiveness Initiative (ENII) of The Denver Foundation represented a unique effort to support the nonprofit sector in developing effective responses to the changing racial-ethnic make-up of a major metropolitan center. Its mission has been to enhance the effectiveness of Metro Denver's nonprofit organizations by helping them become more inclusive of racial-ethnic minorities, or "people of color." Recognizing the national import of this initiative, the Ford and Kellogg Foundations have provided key funding support. In addition, in 2008, The Denver Foundation made this initiative an ongoing program, renaming it The Inclusiveness Project.

Background
An important part of ENII was the development of research and tools that would support the nonprofit sector in addressing the diverse strengths, needs and perspectives of racial-ethnic minority communities through service decisions, design and delivery. These tools included *Inclusiveness at Work: How to Build Inclusive Nonprofit Organizations*, a workbook outlining a six-step process for creating a more inclusive nonprofit organization, and the *Report from the Pipeline*, an assessment of the barriers to greater racial-ethnic minority participation in Denver's nonprofit sector. In addition to disseminating these tools, ENII hosted large conferences targeting nonprofits and addressing issues of inclusiveness. ENII also sponsored workshops offered through the Community Resource Center, an organization providing technical assistance and training to Colorado nonprofits, and a speakers' bureau. Other related efforts included the promotion of dialogue about inclusiveness within the philanthropic sector and the establishment of a steering committee of nonprofit and philanthropic leaders with interest in addressing issues of inclusiveness for the larger sector.

A major component of ENII was the funding and support of eleven grantees, known as "Learning Community Organizations," for a two-year period. These Learning Community Organizations (LCOs) represented different segments of Metro Denver's nonprofit sector including the arts, civic concerns, human services, education, among others. Specifically, ENII provided funding, resources and networking opportunities to these eleven agencies to implement the six-step inclusiveness process outlined in *Inclusiveness at Work*. This evaluation report summarizes what was achieved and learned from the LCO component of the initiative.

Description of the Evaluation
The evaluation was conducted between January 2006 and March 2008 by OMNI Institute, an independent social science research and technical assistance firm. It was designed to: 1) Document and examine the inclusiveness process that unfolded as LCOs applied the *Inclusiveness at Work* framework and activities to their organizations, 2) Assess the ways in which LCOs became more inclusive over time, and 3) Explore potential outcomes of the inclusiveness process for nonprofit effectiveness. The evaluation employed a multiple case, mixed methods, longitudinal design. The design utilized both quantitative (survey) and qualitative (focus group and field observation) methods to supplement one another and answer a wide range of evaluation questions, primarily

exploratory and descriptive in nature. It also permitted data collection at multiple points over the two-year period and a comparison of findings across multiple agencies.

Findings

Through longitudinal data collection efforts, LCOs typically reported <u>increased inclusiveness</u> in:
- Mission and organizational values
- Boards of Directors
- Personnel
- Organizational culture
- Programs and constituents

These same data collection efforts also found evidence that LCOs experienced <u>increased effectiveness</u> as a result of inclusiveness work in the following areas:
- Program delivery
- Public relations
- Community collaboration
- Board governance
- Organizational culture

There were a number of other positive effects of the inclusiveness process that participants identified for their organizations:
- **Ten of the 11 LCOs found that as a result of their participation they enjoyed a more positive work environment and tolerant workplace.** A number of other organizations reported greater staff cohesion and more effective communication. Other experiences included a renewed sense of mission, greater work satisfaction and a "safer" or "more relaxed" work environment for staff from racial-ethnic minority groups.
- **LCOs also indicated that they had more effective personnel and board recruitment practices.** This included a greater emphasis on hiring staff or recruiting board members who shared in the organization's inclusiveness values, as well as a greater emphasis on the racial-ethnic diversity of organizational leadership and boards.
- **All 11 LCOs reported that as a result of inclusiveness work their agencies were able to more effectively serve their clients.** LCOs described gathering and addressing client feedback as a part of the process, as well as placing a greater emphasis on the cultural responsiveness of programming and individual services. In addition, a number of LCOs developed new outreach efforts and community partnerships as a result of their participation.

The evaluation, however, did reveal that there were limited advancements made in changing one indicator of nonprofit inclusiveness over the two-year period, the overall racial-ethnic compositions of participating LCOs. Some agencies made positive strides in terms of increasing the number of staff of color and increasing the overall percentage of staff positions filled by staff of color. Others increased the number of staff of color, but the overall staff size grew and the growth in new staff hired was disproportionately white. Nevertheless, a number of Inclusiveness Committees stated that they felt their organizations laid important groundwork for future hiring of staff of color, including

significant changes in the work environment and personnel practices that would improve recruitment and retention of staff of color.

The inclusiveness process that LCOs undertook as a part of ENII revealed some common challenges that these nonprofits, as a whole, experienced in becoming more inclusive organizations.

- LCOs typically found that they were under-serving and ineffectively reaching important constituencies of the Denver metro community, namely communities of color.
- There tended to be disparities between the racial-ethnic make-up of service populations and that of nonprofit staff and boards.
- LCOs typically found that they allocated relatively few resources to support inclusiveness work, for example, staff training, internal forums and workgroups, bilingual staff, and operational costs associated with offering more accessible services.

The evaluation revealed that organizational training and broad-based engagement in the inclusiveness process were major building blocks for many LCOs in terms of implementing "inclusiveness blueprints."

- Organization-wide training proved an important method for engaging the broader organization in the inclusiveness process.
  - It increased buy-in among staff for the inclusiveness process as a whole and engaged them in everyday dialogue about the role of inclusiveness in the mission of the organization and their own individual work.
  - Organizational training broadened the reach of the committee of representatives working on organizational inclusiveness beyond its members' departments and day-to-day work responsibilities.
  - It promoted interaction between different departments and between board members and staff which, in turn, generated a sense of shared responsibility (and empowerment in regards to) inclusiveness work.

- LCOs found that inclusiveness work was both challenging and rewarding and that having organization wide participation, including organizational leadership support, was key.
  - Having shared vocabulary and concepts, sharing personal experiences, and creating an open and respective forum for the exchange of ideas were three common characteristics of effective organization-wide involvement in the inclusiveness process. These characteristics were associated with broad organizational investment in the work, as well as a commitment among staff and leadership to resolve conflicts that emerged as a result of the work.

The institutionalization of inclusiveness within LCOs assumed many forms:

- Inclusiveness tended to be institutionalized through statements of organizational mission and values, workplace policies (e.g., nondiscrimination clauses), staff training and professional development, hiring and recruitment practices for board and staff, and marketing and programming materials.
- In addition, some LCOs developed creative ways to institutionalize inclusiveness through fund development work, strategic planning processes and staff performance evaluations.

LCOs also pointed to general organizational culture as a reflection of the institutionalization of inclusiveness within their agencies.

Discussion

The inclusiveness process that LCOs initiated as a part of ENII held some surprises. The organizations self-selected to apply for participation in this initiative; implicitly, the LCOs shared a belief in the value of inclusiveness as well as the recognition that an inclusiveness process would be beneficial to their agencies. In addition, a number of the LCOs' Inclusiveness Committees indicated their organizations were not new to this work, that their agencies already had an established history of building an inclusive organization. Therefore, the positive outcomes that developed as a result of this new inclusiveness effort were largely unexpected.

Despite the fact that Inclusiveness Committees typically described their agencies and staff as committed to values and practices that promoted inclusiveness, having a committed organization and staff did not make the work easy. The process was time-consuming, often slow in pace, and resource-intensive. Further, the inclusiveness process sometimes revealed the limits of an organization's current inclusiveness practices, and this was information that not all staff or organizational leaders were prepared to address. Thus, inclusiveness work, at times, met resistance within the organization. However, these periods of resistance were generally viewed as important opportunities for deepening inclusiveness work and organizational commitment.

LCOs tended to take pride in the work accomplished during ENII and acknowledged the hard work, innovation and commitment that this work demanded of their agencies. While there were some common milestones or turning points and experiences that LCOs identified, the inclusiveness process also reflected unique aspects of their organizations. Thus, the integration of inclusiveness work within the organizational culture was a major accomplishment of the LCOs and the initiative.

However, there were different views concerning the institutionalized supports that would help organizations sustain inclusiveness work. Most Inclusiveness Committees felt it was important to institutionalize procedures, practices, and policies in order to sustain their efforts. A few committees did not see the need for formalization of inclusiveness practices if inclusiveness truly was integrated within organizational culture. While change in organizational culture does suggest that there were substantial changes within organizations, the lack of formalized practices and policies within some organizations raises questions about how well inclusiveness was institutionalized in these settings. If staff or board leadership changes, will the gains made in improving the organizational culture be sustained?

Notwithstanding these questions, the evaluation indicated that the inclusiveness process changed organizational climate: it led to greater staff cohesion and a more positive and tolerant work environment. Several agencies found that the inclusiveness process also resulted in better communication and job satisfaction. Moreover, LCOs reported that participation in ENII resulted in greater effectiveness in most areas of organizational management and in more effective client services. Data on the reduction of racial-ethnic disparities among boards, staff and volunteers, however, appeared to somewhat dampen the effects that participants attributed to their inclusiveness work. While there were some positive changes among a number of agencies, in terms of decreasing disparities either on boards or among staff or volunteers, there were not clear cut patterns. It very well may be that the environmental changes that occurred necessarily preceded other changes in

board membership, staff and volunteer support and that two years was not sufficient time to fully achieve these types of changes.

Conclusions and Recommendations

ENII Learning Community Organizations found the implementation of the workbook guidelines for inclusiveness to be not only a meaningful experience but also a process that made them more effective as a nonprofit agency.

>**Recommendation 1:** Utilize Learning Community Organizations as ambassadors for The Denver Foundation's new ongoing program, the Inclusiveness Project, to help other nonprofits and philanthropic entities recognize the opportunities for the sector.

>**Recommendation 2:** Consider developing the training capacity of Learning Community Organizations so that they can consult with other, similar nonprofits in implementing the workbook. This could help sustain the work that began under the initiative by supporting further institutionalization of inclusiveness work within LCOs and further expansion of the reach of The Denver Foundation's work within the nonprofit sector.

>**Recommendation 3:** Consider the development of training modules to address specific areas of organizational management, such as board governance and community relations, in order to help nonprofits envision what greater inclusiveness in that area might look like and how it might enhance effectiveness. Findings in this evaluation report and consultation with participating LCOs could help inform the development of these training modules. This not only might support nonprofits as they embark on this work, but also provide support to those LCOs which may have made a number of important advances in some areas, but did not reach others as of yet.

Engaging the nonprofit sector in efforts to strengthen its response to increasingly racially and ethnically diverse communities requires a long-term commitment to what is a timely but intensive and complex process.

>**Recommendation 4:** Take the long view of inclusiveness change efforts and build these expectations into strategic planning for the new Inclusiveness Project of The Denver Foundation.

>**Recommendation 5:** Work with LCOs to identify long term strategies for addressing disparities in organizational leadership. This process may help clarify where to focus Inclusiveness Project resources to sustain this important effort.