



Marta Brockmeyer, Ph.D. Project Pointers

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POISED FOR PARTNERSHIP



I have enjoyed speaking to several groups lately and always feel energized by the exchanges. What a challenging summer we are having with so many regional initiatives to understand and support, plenty of political drama, uncertainty about new reimbursement rates and a general feeling of being on hold. *Uncertainty* is the word I hear most, and even my most upbeat, optimistic colleagues are feeling anxious as they wait for decisions to be made.

In the midst of so much change, the need for supporting one another has never been more important. Your generosity in helping each other stay the course is rewarding, whether it's delivering a box of brownies to a long time leader who is having board chair problems or sharing evaluation documents with a first-time executive director. We can also remind each other of the many possibilities on the horizon. No matter how unclear things may feel, we have exciting opportunities before us.

TURNING POINT



Opportunities

The current landscape offers a set of circumstances that make true change possible. While there are as many variables as there are human services organizations, seven key big picture opportunities are emerging or expanding.

1. **Regional, cross systems engagement**

The content-specific systems are showing more desire and openness to work with each other. This willingness to critically look at the outcomes of other systems and focus on equity has the potential to impact our citizens in big ways. Fewer clients will fall through the cracks, money will be spent more effectively, and nonprofits can speak with one voice to better advocate for those in need.

2. **More attention for those with multiple diagnoses**

In recent years, we have seen an increase in the numbers of clients as well as an increase in the complexity of each one's challenges. It is difficult for one agency to treat the whole person when it exclusively focuses on the guidelines of its particular system (disabilities, seniors, early childhood learning, etc.). Too often, clients receive help with only one life issue when they have five other issues that also need attention. When the various systems share information and plan together, clients who have more than one presenting challenge are more likely to be served in a holistic manner.

3. **Multigenerational learning**

We are seeing the transfer of money, wisdom and power across generations at an unprecedented rate. Differences in generational learning styles and role expectations tend to break down some of the traditional views of authority and content expertise. It is not unusual for someone who is thirty to be the expert when working with a group of senior employees with tenure. Clients may also be involved in planning and implementation. With Boomers working longer than previous generations did, most nonprofit staffs reflect a larger range of ages than ever before. Younger colleagues usually have newer, innovative ways to approach projects, and seasoned staff members bring balance and experience. Yes, we can learn a lot from each other!

4. **Increased collaborations**

The decision to collaborate is no longer an option - we must come together to create comprehensive solutions. Mutually beneficial partnerships between social sector, government and corporate entities can enhance the goals of all parties. Continuing to advance a mission independently greatly reduces the likelihood of sustainability, with the resulting loss of good client experiences.

5. **Strengthened business operations**

To meet the demands of so much change, our organizations are adopting more sophisticated business practices. In addition to "doing good," human services agencies are evaluating reimbursement processes, launching new HR management procedures and conducting IT audits. The infrastructure is a higher priority because the times demand it. Nonprofits are viewed more as business entities and they have, in general, enjoyed growing respect from the corporate and government worlds. In some cases, the social sector leaders are viewed as the forward-thinking trendsetters in an area. The emphasis on social enterprises has also challenged the status quo of funding deficits.

6. **Communications and technology**

This opportunity is probably too limitless for us to even imagine. With the advances in technology, leaders are better able to promote mission and communicate with stakeholders, clients and families, and internal customers. Data can now be analyzed in new ways, showing detailed outcomes and overall effectiveness. Fundraising opportunities also can grow, as more targeted marketing allows us to tell our stories in concrete, authentic ways.

7. Sense of urgency

We're starting to realize that we must move more quickly than we have in the past. Our clients cannot wait; our agencies cannot wait to change. The willingness of the various systems to work together is contributing to the faster pace across agencies, but concerns about sustainability also leave little time to waste. Successful organizations must align with and contribute to the collective impact and support the various initiatives for real change. Simply, we have the opportunity to think in terms of the future. The level of stress that accompanies this shift is palpable, but the new sense of urgency may be the opportunity that ultimately brings the most results.

VIEWPOINT: IN MY EXPERIENCE



Thanks to those who submitted questions - here are a few recent ones:

Q. Why do you usually use the word *partnership*?

A. I prefer this word because it serves as an umbrella term that best represents how I think about groups coming together. When people from various organizations decide to work together, their goals fall somewhere on a continuum that ranges from cooperation through full corporate merger. Along the way, the goals may change and participants may not land where they thought they would. While the word *merger* is often used generically, it has a precise legal definition and should not be used to cover all situations. The term can also set the expectation of a full corporate combination before other, perhaps better, options are even considered.



Q. Where should we meet?

A. Space can symbolize power and authority. The type of partnership often determines where groups will hold meetings. If two organizations decide to explore a merger, a neutral and private location is ideal. Obviously, confidentiality is easier to maintain when committee participants are not observed. The room arrangements are also important. One of my larger projects was particularly contentious and the sterile, intimidating conference room did not encourage openness. In some cases, one of the merger partners may have a wonderful meeting space. If the other partner suggests meeting there, then the group can proceed with a feeling of equality.

Partnership meetings that do not require privacy allow for more options. Still, a neutral meeting place is always best. Some groups prefer to rotate the meeting site among participants. This allows each organization to share more information about its work, but frequently changing meeting locations can be confusing. It is not unusual for attendance to drop simply because people forget where they are supposed to go.

Q. When should we create a communications plan?

A. Before or as soon as you start your project! Too often, we wait until a problem arises before we think about what to say and when to say it. For effective implementation, controlling the content and timing is key. In some cases, sharing details of a plan too early may limit its success. More often, the lack of clear, consistent message creates confusion among partners and in the community.

Questions? Let me know and I'll include them (anonymously) in an upcoming newsletter.

TALKING POINTS



"Marta, as usual, you hit it out of the park! Thanks for your professionalism and willingness to share your tremendous insights."

-- Karen Finan, former Redwood board chair

"Your presentation was so on target last night! Every time you made a point, I felt like standing up and saying, "Right on, sister!""

-- Human Services CEO

End Point

Slowly and hopefully, we are coming together more as a region. We are experiencing a small but important, collective shift through conversations, mutual goal setting and shared strategies that often cross state lines. Some social sector leaders will resist these trends and continue to struggle with their independent agendas. The best leaders will take advantage of the opportunities and focus on sustaining the missions of their organizations.



Enjoy the rest of the summer,

WORKSHOP REMINDER



Marta's popular Project Management Basics workshop will be offered on September 20, 2016. This workshop receives consistently high marks from participants.

[Project Management Basics](#)

Tuesday, September 20, 2016, 9:00 a.m. - 12:00 p.m.
at Interact for Health
3805 Edwards Road, Suite 500
Cincinnati, OH 45209

WORKSHOP REGISTRATION

Workshops on Site

For convenience and increased participation, you may prefer an in-house workshop. When a larger number of employees share concepts, language and tools, projects move along more smoothly. In some cases, a series of customized follow-up activities complement the foundational workshop. Evaluations from recent on-site trainings have been enthusiastic. Please contact Marta for more information about in-house, customized training.

TOUCH POINT: CLIENT SPOTLIGHT



Marvin Lewis Community Fund

When Marvin Lewis came to Cincinnati in 2003 as the newly appointed Head Coach of the Cincinnati Bengals, he and his wife, Peggy knew they wanted to help their new community. What originally began as a fund to help other nonprofits soon grew into the Marvin Lewis Community Fund. Its mission is to promote youth education throughout the area through five core outreach programs. Now in its 13th year, the Fund has raised over \$10.5 million with 91 cents of each dollar reinvested back into the community.

The fund's largest program, *Learning is Cool*, now serves over 30,000 students in four urban public school districts. This educational rewards program recognizes "A" Honor Roll achievements to promote strong academic performance in grades 1-8 in Cincinnati Public, Middletown City, and North College Hill Schools and grades 1-12 in Covington Independent Public Schools. Since implementing the program eight years ago, the number of Honor Roll achievements has continued to rise. In 2016, over 7,500 students qualified to attend a special Academic Achievement Celebration at the Cincinnati Zoo for reaching the "A" Honor Roll at least twice. This annual event is the highlight of the year for many students, as well as the MLCF staff, who love to see the smiles on the students' faces when they are personally congratulated by Coach Lewis or when a Bengals player presents them with their medal.

The Fund's other programs include the Marvin Lewis Scholarship Fund which awarded eight \$20,000 college scholarships to outstanding local students this past May. The MLCF is honored to help these exceptional young people reach their full potential by helping them attend the college of their choice. Other programs include Hometown Huddle, Youth Football Camp and Coaching Clinic, serving the community through volunteerism and education.

To learn more about the Marvin Lewis Community Fund, please visit their [website](#).



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