The Art of Convening:

A Baltimore Case Study of *Communities for Change*

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Abstract

The *Communities for Change* (C4C) program sought to strengthen and stabilize neighborhoods in Baltimore by connecting visionary leaders of community-led and community-owned neighborhood development to new resources and skills. Impact Hub Baltimore (IHB) and its organizing partners co-designed the C4C program; invited diverse stakeholders to participate; and led a structured 8-week process of collaborative learning. Weekly meetings built a collective understanding of neighborhood development models, historic challenges, and each participant's role in overcoming those challenges. Learning sessions sought to build systems awareness, leadership skills, and trusted relationships to advance fresh solutions to the complex challenges of housing stability and neighborhood development. Participants learned the value of deep listening, building empathy, and prototyping solutions. At the end of the eight weeks, one group formed around a multi-faceted prototype for regenerative neighborhoods and has begun a neighborhood development initiative with the values of community-ownership and leadership at its core. The C4C program sought to strengthen and stabilize neighborhoods in Baltimore by connecting visionary leaders of community-led and community-owned neighborhood development to new resources and skills. IHB and its organizing partners co-designed the C4C program, invited diverse stakeholders to participate, and led a structured 8-week process of collaborative learning. Weekly meetings built a collective understanding of neighborhood development models, historic challenges, and each participant's role in overcoming those challenges. Learning sessions sought to build systems awareness, leadership skills, and trusted relationships to advance fresh solutions to the complex challenges of housing

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stability and neighborhood development. Participants learned the value of deep listening, building empathy, and prototyping solutions. At the end of the eight weeks, one group formed around a multi-faceted prototype for regenerative neighborhoods and has begun a neighborhood development initiative with the values of community-ownership and leadership at its core.

This case narrative describes the program design of C4C, its implementation process, and the resulting ideas and relationships it produced. This case challenges students to identify strengths and weaknesses of the C4C program design, examine its operational successes and missteps; and explore methods to convene collective learning cohorts, develop grassroots leadership, and advance meaningful systems change .   While this specific case involves neighborhood development in Baltimore, its lessons apply to a wide range of social entrepreneurs and innovators seeking to implement strategies for real and lasting social impact.

The Art of Convening:
A Baltimore Case Study of *Communities for Change*[1]

Candace Chance: A Master of Local Context

On Thursday, February 15th, 2018, Candace Chance, a community-based social entrepreneurship consultant in Baltimore, sat serenely in a small group, hands folded in her lap. With a well-informed smile, she was describing how her community-led organization, B-CIITY, was allocating Baltimore City Health Department funds to address trauma and youth. This is where Candace's real story begins, with a lament about finding ways to ensure that B-CIITY is accountable to the authentic needs of residents. She came that evening hoping to learn basic skills that would help B-CIITY succeed in its mission.

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[1]

Candace does not have a background in finance, nor do B-CIITY's committee members. What she does have is a deep understanding of the community she works in. Candace is a community leader. She has lived in Druid Heights in West Baltimore for her entire life, and continues to live and work there. She has built lasting relationships and friendships with others in the neighborhood, who have goals to improve neighborhoods just like she does - and because she is connected, she understands nuanced details of the context of her community. She knows her neighbors' values and their desires, what makes them upset and what makes them speak out. She knows what they want to improve in their neighborhood, and she can navigate through her work by building strategies uniquely tailored to her community's social, economic, and racial background. But the same problem comes up time and time again: a lack of technical expertise that is needed to implement projects (understanding finances, policies, etc.). She is also unsure of how to attract more resources to her organization and neighborhood, but if she did, she could implement her projects a lot better. Candace's problem is not unique to her; it extends to many community leaders who know the context, but could use more technical skills to make a difference.

Brendan Schreiber: A Master of Content

On another side of the room, Brendan Schreiber listened intently to a story about struggles with low-resource community work. Brendan is quite different from Candace. He is a developer who works in housing around Baltimore. Brendan knows how to attract money to his work, knows the intricacies and policies of housing in Baltimore, and knows how to implement actual development projects on site. He wants to do good in communities that need improvement, but does not know what his specific project should be. He remains an outsider to the Baltimore neighborhoods most in need of affordable housing. He knows little about the community's perspectives and shared memory and thus lacks grounding in most of the details that are only found within the people and their relationships. He does, however, possess technical knowledge that Candace needs. His presence in the room was fueled by his desire to learn what "doing good" looks like. He had the content - skills that he could use in community development - but not the contextual knowledge that Candace has.

Michelle Geiss: Convener

In the fall of 2017 Michelle Geiss was in her office at IHB getting off a conference call on a concept called "Communities for Change" (C4C). IHB is part of a growing landscape of organizations that support and grow meaningful, impact-driven ventures across the city.[2]. Within Baltimore, Impact Hub supports the city's social entrepreneurs by connecting them to necessary resources to cultivate growth, and ultimately enable individuals and organizations to go further with their mission. As IHB's Co-Founder and Executive Director, Michelle was aware of dozens of people like Candace and Brendan. There were scores of disconnected context masters and content masters in Baltimore. Her conference call that day asked for local Impact Hubs to hold parallel programs called community learning events that could serve a catalytic process by convening a safe neutral space that could bring together context people and content people.

Convening is nowhere near as simple as booking a room, scheduling a date, and emailing invites. People who come from different backgrounds do not automatically establish rapport. There are barriers and well known design features to help people get over barriers. There are details. Michelle has years of experience in the art of convening. She had practical experience bridging cultural gaps from her time working for an NGO in Togo and content experience from an MPH degree and she had invested in knowing and networking in Baltimore. The success of IHB was in large part due to its strong emphasis on connecting individuals and gathering resources to broaden social impact in the city.

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[2] *Impact Hub*. Part innovation lab, part coworking space, part civic forum, Impact Hub offers an inspiring space for the city's social changemakers and thought leaders to grow, connect, and thrive. Its mission is grounded in a core belief that opportunities for growth and positive change arise when these individuals and organizations are brought together, and connected with each other and the right resources. What makes IHB stand out amongst efforts in the city is that it is locally-rooted *and* globally connected -- Convinced that complex challenges demand collaborative solutions, Impact Hub joined its global network in 2014 to spark innovative solutions and cross-sector partnerships within Baltimore's network, as well as its global network of 100+ physical locations in 50+ countries and five continents worldwide.

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Discussion Question

The three principals in the case have an array of needs and assets. The table below is partially completed but has three blanks. Please complete the missing cells.

	Candace the community leader	Michelle the convener	Brendan the Developer
The need		Collective learning across sectors to fuel collective action	Understanding of community needs to create relevant resources
The assets	Context knowledge neighborhood expertise relationships		

What this Case is About

The art of convening is about the very nuanced details that rarely show up in reports or articles. It is about very specific knowledge of the needs, perspectives, and comfort zones of different groups. It relies on possessing both contextual knowledge and content knowledge that can only be gained by a stock of meaningful relationships and years of actively tuning into issues. Failed convening happens when details about how to start and sustain conversations between context and content are ignored or omitted. People who aspire to lead community-based solution finding and collective action to foster human thriving cannot afford failure. The story of how C4C unfolded is a detail-rich account of one approach to building collaborations between context and content. Reading and discussing this case cannot replace learning by convening, but is an insightful introduction to detailed nuances in the art of convening.

Discussion Questions

1) Name somebody you know who is a context master. How did they get that way? What words would you use to describe their type of knowledge?
2) Name somebody you know who is a content master on things relevant to community well-being. How did they get that way? What words describe their type of knowledge?
3) Name a convener. How did they get their skills? What do they know that makes them succeed?

Meanwhile Back in Baltimore

Scattered around the room in Baltimore's hip Station North neighborhood on a February Thursday night, other groups conversed with occasional bursts of camaraderie. There were developers, activists, bankers, academics, neighborhood organizers, architects, city officials, and health experts. Each was struggling with the politically charged power dynamics of housing problems in Baltimore; decades of urban exodus, gentrification, and over a century of structural racism and redlining had marred the city with too many vacant shells, too little decent affordable housing, too many people with insecure housing. Each of the group members had come because they saw housing issues from a perspective that they knew was incomplete and each was trying to move beyond constrained viewpoints.

More specifically, everyone had been strategically invited by IHB's planning committee to participate in *Communities 4 Change* (C4C), an 8-week workshop focused on collective learning and understanding that was designed by IHB. Uncertain expectations were prevalent. Expressing her initial thoughts on community organizing, Candace voiced an uncertainty shared by other workshop participants. "It's very difficult to have a community learning process . . . the question then becomes, who are we seeking in community? And what are we saying is community? Like, what is the goal?"

Candace and Brendan are not alone, in terms of being concerned about the possibility of closing gaps in their knowledge and collaboratory networks. Throughout the nation and the world, people who want to solve problems collectively are questioning the scope of their own skills and their strategies for forming common cause. They are exploring new ways to

collaborate for more powerful impact on people struggling with livability barriers in their communities.

Baltimore: Divided and Developing

Baltimore is endowed with visionary leaders committed to a better narrative and reality for its residents. People care deeply about their communities and harbor an emerging vision of a Better Baltimore, They are working to address the city's complex challenges through collaboration. Multiple perspectives on life in Baltimore are joining to give the city's social changemakers a realistic and hopeful understanding of the city's challenges.

Baltimore's economy remains starkly divided between haves and have-nots in the labor force. The city's population peaked at one milion after World War II. A post-war decline in manufacturing jobs combined with the suburbanization of the growing service sector began 50 year city exodus that has left the city with 600,000 residents and far too many vacant and abandoned buildings. The city's economy is sustained by a major East-coast shipping hub, a major research university, and some regrowth of light manufacturing. An informal shadow economy is sustained by sales of illicit drugs, mainly heroin. Jobs for unskilled workers are scarce. The city remains racially segregated and housing prices perpetuate a geography of the same haves and have-nots. Developers and planners are building big top-down solutions. A tourist-friendly waterfront brings in thousands to a word-class convention center. Technology-hubs are springing up around the university and the Federal government is investing $30 million in new and modern public housing.

Compared to other East Coast cities, rents and residential sales prices are relatively low. However, compared to the achievable wages of Baltimore's legacy workforce, decent and affordable housing is elusive. There is a fundamental disconnect between what workers can afford to pay and what it costs to maintain existing housing stock or build brand new units. Factoring in a premium for the price of a good location near transport, grocery stores, good schools, and affordable decent housing remains scarce.

In addition to top-down institutional strategies, Baltimore is incubating bottom-up solutions. Communities everywhere face a legacy of unsolved historical problems as they brace for the coming challenges of a competitive global economy. Every community has

untapped assets and resources in its people, but their separateness and segregation prevents the realization of synergy and defies the creation of collective agency. At this moment in history, no community can afford to idly allow its treasures—its people—to stay unconnected to the ways they can work together to fuel human flourishing.

Social innovation initiatives are a critical resource for overcoming the deep social inequities of post-industrial US cities, like Baltimore, that pose profound humanitarian challenges and threaten their ability to harness the productivity of human talent required to sustain and grow their local economies. Baltimore is a foundation for positioning US cities in a competitive global economy driven by human talent.

The Background of C4C

Towards the end of 2017, many leaders of Impact Hubs around the world conceived the idea of parallel community events. Michelle Geiss realized that she knew dozens of people doing inspiring community leadership around housing and community development. Furthermore, she realized that they could be more effective if they got together.   Candace is a prime example because she convened and designed her own board to work on B-CIITY, but what she and many other people do not have are the skills and knowledge about real estate development. Baltimore also has several community developers who would be more successful if paired with community groups, because they want better insight into what communities prioritize. However, effectiveness does not always mean efficiency. Candace expressed her views on context masters like herself finding themselves time-strapped in the face of seeking partnerships with content masters. As she notes, "If we want to bring in community leaders who are doing [development] work […] it can be really challenging because those people are already really engaged in other processes. […] They have a ton of things on their plate. […] How do we have practical components where people can take it back to work with them the next day and see a result?" Michelle's understanding of these circumstances faced by many grassroots organizers further prompted the need to initiate a convening and gathering that could be an efficient and purposeful use of an already limited bank of time. So C4C was conceived to fulfill the need for building collaboration between people who have complementary assets to improve housing in Baltimore.

There were many design features for C4C, and one of the first decisions taken by Impact Hub was to convene a Steering Committee to help with planning. The committee started meeting in late fall of 2017 and started to snowball an invitation list and develop the content for the events. They had a lot of design decisions, many of which were influenced by their knowledge of best practices in convening and collective learning.

Glossary of Social Technologies related to Convening

Collective Impact--Refers to a strategy of coalescing a community's issue groups around problem solving. A backbone agency commits to spearhead convening and gathering a set of shared metrics. The members gather repeatedly to define their assets, to see synergies and to exploit complementarities. The backbone agency commits to repeated measures of progress towards measurable shared goals.

Art of Hosting-Refers to a suite of methods including "world cafe", "the circle way", and "appreciative inquiry" that can help disparate groups come together, build trust, and build linkages.

Community Life Competence and SALT--Refers to a learning cycle based on community participation in building trust, and then going through a cycle of assessment, planned action, and course correction.

Presencing and Theory U Refers to an approach to based on having the members of an organization learn better methods of listening to each other and being present to each other so that co-creation can occur through the creation of a co-evolving whole.

The Global C4C Design Process: Convening the Changemakers

Michelle and workers from Impact Hubs all around the world worked together to plan a special program. They wanted to represent in a tangible way their vision of communities unifying and sharing knowledge together. With Impact Hubs in Boulder, Budapest, Harare, Seattle and Shanghai, they crafted an 8-week program that would focus on a pressing community issue, attributing to it the fitting title, "Communities For Change." While many systems change processes embrace small-group coaching, the C4C format emphasized unique change-based methods in levels of listening: downloading, taking in surface information; factual, using truth in the information to realign your beliefs; empathic, using information to see through the eyes of another; and generative, connecting information with an emerging future. This would act as base lessons in having an open mind, heart, and will that everyone could build on throughout C4C to connect on more insightful levels.

Michelle felt that IHB's C4C experience should revolve around something that all Baltimoreans want: safe, healthy neighborhoods for families to thrive in. In particular, Baltimore C4C wanted to answer the question: *How might we connect leaders of community-led, community-owned neighborhood development to the resources and skills they need to realize their visions of strong and stable neighborhoods?*

In Baltimore C4C, people from different sectors gathered at Impact Hub to talk, listen, learn, and apply. One person brought expertise on developing community land trusts; another offered research on poverty in Baltimore; another led her neighborhood association, and expressed the struggles in doing so. Each week, everyone participated in different activities facilitated by IHB's leaders and C4C creators, including introspection, meditation, 3D sculpting, small group discussions, and Learning Journeys (individual, community-centered activities that would help the people of C4C expand their perspectives on a related issue of interest). Empathy and understanding could not be ignored as part of C4C, given the constitution of the participants. People who had never experienced hardship heard of never-ending hardship from the person next to them. Community leaders expressed their struggles and hopes, and allowed others to process - or at least try to, at the surface - the emotions associated with these experiences. It all helped build a certain level of hope, will, and trust between everyone, which

would ultimately fuel their enhanced understanding of each other's visions and potential to contribute to community-led endeavors. Within the final three weeks, participants had concrete ideas of projects to take into the city and an enhanced vision of future collaboration.
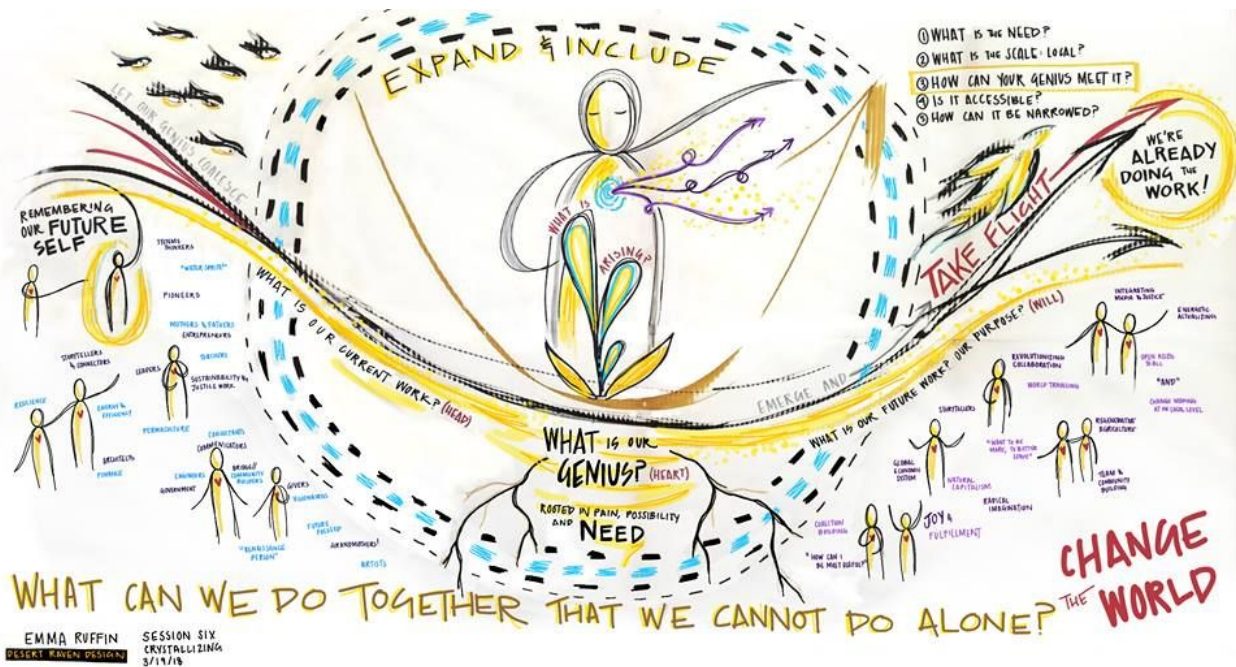

Figure 1: The rationale for collective efforts to bring about community change. Illustration by Emma Ruffin. Used with permission.

In designing C4C, housing was an obvious issue to focus on, as Michelle explained:

> The reason we picked housing and community development as our focus is that it's a really pressing issue in the city, it's also something that had come up a lot even just around IHubs own kind of place in the neighborhood and place in the market. How do you make sure that as the city is improving for certain residents, it's improving for everybody? And that we're not contributing to the displacement of people who have either been running businesses in the neighborhood that we're in or were long-term residents?

Global C4C Goes Live in Baltimore

Exhibit A: Weekly C4C Schedule & Contents

	Skills & Learning	Content Focus
Week 0 co-initiating	Intention Setting & Intro Visioning Guided journaling Mini Case Clinic	- State of Housing & Neighborhoods - Community Land Trusts
Week 1 co-initiating	Listening & Empathy Levels of listening Case Clinics Empathy Walk	- Past, present & future of affordable housing (City Planning Dept) -
Week 2 co-sensing	Leadership Challenges Case Clinics Stakeholder Interviews	- Community leadership & organizing (Neighborhood Organizations: Penn North, Greenmount West, BUILD)
Week 3 co-sensing	Seeing the System Social Presencing Theater (Stuck)	- Housing Policy - State perspectives from Annapolis
Week 4 presencing	Future Possibilities Letter Writing Dialogue Walk	- Financing (PNC, African American Housing Development Cooperative)
Week 5 crystalizing	Focus 3D Sculpting Acupuncture Points	-Public Space & Design
Week 6 prototyping	Learning by Doing 4D Mapping Open Space for participant Prototype Development	-Blight, Deconstruction & Rebuilding (Fight Blight Bmore)
Week 7 co-evolving	Idea Development Individual & Collective Reflection Action Planning	

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Discussion Questions

1. Column 1 has headings "co-sensing, presencing, crystalizing, prototyping, co-evolving". What do you think these headings refer to? Why are they in that order?
2. There are separate columns for "skills and learning" and "content focus". What do you think the difference is?

The C4C workshop sessions were conducted at IHB's location in Station North, where participants from across the city would filter into a room set up as a circle. The first 20-30 minutes of each session was left open for people to socialize over dinner, allowing spontaneous break-the-ice conversations to fill the unscripted time. Each week participants knew to expect two and half hours of discussion about, as originally intended, **housing and neighborhood development** (See Exhibit A). Less expected, but no less impactful were exercises on listening that would transform the ways in which they interacted with each other. The content on listening and connecting was motivated by Theory U and the work of Otto Scharmer. For example, the second C4C session opened with the Theory U topic of levels of listening. The purpose was not to steer the session's focus towards listening; it merely helped participants become self-aware of how they process opinions, which laid the base for how they behaved when discussing neighborhood development and community-led initiatives. This way, C4C facilitators were able to use Theory U content without overwhelming the focus on housing.

C4C kept the focus on addressing community problems while simultaneously getting participants to connect with each other, and to learn how to connect. Candace's small-group was assigned to answer, "How can B-CIITY provide wraparound services like financial counseling that many community-based organizations need along with being the organization's grant donor?" and "How can B-CIITY's grant making process engage community-buy-in from the beginning?" As her five "coaches" brainstormed with her on several ideas, the group facilitator, Michelle, soon asked everyone to take three minutes of silence to reflect on what everyone had just said and heard. The reflections revealed that previously rigid ideas had opened and absorbed facets of other members of the group. This produced a melting pot of ideas that came together rather than a distinct list of brainstormed disconnected pet ideas.

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Furthermore, Candace's time in reflection allowed her to dig deeper into which of her questions she felt deserved more time, energy and ultimately discussion. Regarding the latter of the two issues posed to the short group, Candace laid out that listening to the community before the committee meets to decide which organizations should win the grant was her intended goal. Understanding that if community-buy-in was going to be honest and thoughtful, it would have to be conducted in a manner that was inclusive and timely. The small group discussed principles instead of one-trick solutions. For example, they focussed on the role of listening to others and how that might be leveraged in this task of gaining community-buy-in. The result? This small group of six came up with a model that Candace could not only use for community-buy-in prior to the committee decision on grant recipients, but also as a model for having more voices heard in general. This model consisted of each grant applicant setting up a booth on a particular evening and inviting all community members to go around and speak with the applicant and discuss what that organization might provide to the community. Upon doing so, the community member could cast a vote if they approved or not cast their vote if they did not approve–having only five votes to distribute throughout the evening. This created both a benchmarking system for the committee to see where the community's interest lays and a model of buy-in on the part of the community as the community's top picks became the committee's final pool of selection. Candace and her coaches discussed this model and decided that although it is an option, achieving full community buy-in will ultimately be a process of having the community's voices heard and the more this is worked towards, the better the outcome. Candace walked away from this small group discussion and the Thursday evening C4C session with this principle, not task, in mind.

Each weekly session was structured differently, but all strove towards the same dynamic: comfort in sharing experiences with others, and listening digestively to others sharing their experiences back. The ice was initially hard to break at the beginning. The first meeting, Session 0, began with an inquiry for participants about why they were attracted to C4C, what their aspirations are, and what are their sources of frustration. Everyone was provided a journal on which to write their answers and share them with the group, providing first insights into their professional and perhaps personal lives. Some shared what in their life gives them

energy to do what they do ('children,' 'seeing a real difference,' 'learning'), what they have to let go of to move forward ('money problems,' 'frustrating people'), and what they want to "let into" their lives to realize their aspirations and intentions for C4C. This was a vital step into glimpsing other participants' visions - not just on the surface, but also underneath, where a mosaic of diverse experiences have shaped their ideologies.

Session 0 focused on community land trusts (CLTs), in which attendee Ryan Flanigan and his colleagues gave a crash course on the innovative housing model. Ryan is a CLT developer based in Remington who wanted to prevent community displacement due to rising housing prices and gentrification. As Ryan spoke passionately and rigorously about the importance of community-level work, participants learned the foundations of his area of expertise: that CLTs are permanently affordable, community-controlled housing that use contracts and nonprofits to remedy how land is currently harmfully distributed across Baltimore. While other housing models tend to extract wealth from neighborhoods, CLTs keep money in the neighborhood, and thus keep affordability and people in their communities. However, despite the promising radical model, CLTs are missing the toughest part of the equation: funding. Upon further small group discussions with Ryan and friends, Session 0 set a precedent of active learning, listening, and questioning both in large groups of people and in small breakouts.

Not all precedents were positive. At Session 1 in the next week, the group encountered one of the greatest challenges that would reappear throughout C4C: collective frustration and pessimism. While these emotions were a barrier that C4C strove to overcome as part of its goals to spark innovation and knowledge sharing, they also inevitably downplayed the hope that Session 0 had instilled in everyone's heads. Guest attendees at Session 1 who worked in the housing private sector pored over the toughest barriers to making change, including money, lack of political will, and outsiders' apparent lack of care towards Baltimore community well-being. The actual C4C attendees shared countless exhaustions they experienced, which in turn flooded the room with negativity. Such expressions of frustrations would not go away completely.

Despite the sombre emotions being shared, there was tremendous progress occurring in a different dimension. Sessions 0 and 1 had introduced participants to Theory U's four levels of

open-minded listening. The idea is that to get to a point where parties can unite in generative learning - a position where they can connect and share perspectives, they have to go on a journey that begins with an initial downloading of "what is this person saying" and progress towards a connection based on empathy. The muted content of Session 1 that had devolved into frustration also became a successful lab-session in open-minded listening. This forward motion would not have been possible if the C4C facilitators had not spent time on outlining a framework for practicing open-minded listening, an act that served to relax the participants from discussing their professional challenges and guide them into an empathic process of understanding each other's troubles. This way, the second week of the program would not end with a bad taste.

At Session 2, the question of the night was: how do communities organize? Attendees learned from regular attendee Lane Victorson, faculty at the University of Maryland School of Social Work, about power dynamics between organizing *with* versus *for* people. Understanding this was undeniably crucial, given the constitution of the C4C attendee group. For example, some pointed out that most of C4C was comprised of community leaders, not community *members*, which also affected these power dynamics. Community leaders work at nonprofits and neighborhood associations established in their residence area, and are what they are called: leaders. They represent a group of people or values shared by some people in the community, and tend to speak on everyone else who is not a leader - the community members' - behalf. Having community members themselves speak to power dynamics in their own stories would have spurred a new characterization of power and understanding in C4C.

Lane's presentation established in Session 2 that while direct action on the part of a community organizer attracts attention, as it seeks to challenge existing power relationships, this organizer could be overlooking key community interests. This would be an example of organizing *for* people. C4C participants became acutely aware that in order to work with the community they may not need to seek direct action efforts—an intuitive step that often and unintentionally exacerbates the inequitable power dynamic. Ironically, participants practiced active listening within C4C sessions and learned in Session 2 that working with people often

requires an initial phase of active listening, a repeated theme, and trust-building with community-members.

Candace's B-CIITY presentations took place in Session 2, along with other small group presentations on Baltimore youth groups, neighborhood associations, peer housing platforms, and farmers markets. Throughout the night, Lilla Watson's famous quote reverberated in the back of everyone's minds, *"If you have come here to help me, you are wasting your time. But if you have come because your liberation is bound up with mine, then let us work together."*

Discussion Questions

Lilla Watson is an Aboriginal Australian and activist. The context of her quote was an international meeting of social activists who were at a UN meeting in Nairobi to redress oppression.
1. What does it mean to say "your liberation is bound up with mine" in Watson's context?
2. Would you agree that Watson is being obstructionist by stipulating an "arbitrary" pre-condition like this before groups can work together? Why or why not.
3. In what way was the 8 week arc of sessions in C4C designed to achieve the Watson pre-condition of awareness of mutual liberation?
4. In C4C, who were the parties who needed to become aware of their need for mutual liberation?

By Session 3 (week 4) it emerged that a few of the regular attendees had extensive experience in housing and development efforts. Some had led their own projects, while others collaborated with like-minded people to implement projects together. As a result, they had struggled through numerous barriers and dealt with the higher-level responsibilities that comes with their work. Because they were more familiar with each other's background in this regard, their voices dominated more often. This posed a danger to achieving centrality and understanding between the group, when the centrality naturally fell on the people with this experience. Furthermore, some members simply talked less than others, perhaps out of personal habit.

As aforementioned, one of the largest difficulties in the C4C process was the frequent discussion of frustrations, more specifically the inequities, financial stalemates, and political infeasibilities of some neighborhood development solutions. Ryan often talked about his struggles with financing and decreased power in the hands of the city government, frequently returning to his Remington project with miniscule gains. Others employed in the housing market spent most of their time pointing out the disadvantages to communities that the market structure naturally imposes, with general agreement from some group members on how difficult it is to make change when there is a power imbalance.

Other schisms became more apparent during small group work when some participants began to recall their personal experiences of living through periods of unstable housing and the daily threat of eviction. This deep connection to the context of personal trauma from unstable housing was not shared by content experts and became a wedge issue. "You don't understand anything about housing because you have never been threatened with eviction like me," said one.

Discussion Question

The conflict of legitimacy is often expressed in terms like "You and people like you don't belong in this discussion because you don't know what I know." And this statement can come from either technical content masters or context masters.
1. How would you handle conflict about who is legitimately authorized to participate in discussions of a topic?
2. Why do you think legitimacy schisms are such a routine part of group processes?

The highlight of Session 4 was a 3D sculpting exercise that asked participants to break into small groups and use Play-Doh to make sculptural representations of the future of Baltimore housing. Aside from the pure fun of the assignment, the exercise built team cooperation. In an exercise that felt like "play," a spirit of playfulness broke down barriers and drove an "anything goes" culture. There was a breakout of corny ideas as well as revolutionary ideas. Interestingly, City Hall loomed large in the center of many sculptures that night although prior weeks of discussion had not placed City politics and municipal regulations into the foreground of what the group felt it had gathered to do. Yet the task of building 3D sculptures and the low barrier to introducing concepts and issues opened many individuals into safely expressing what they saw as unhelpful city policies.
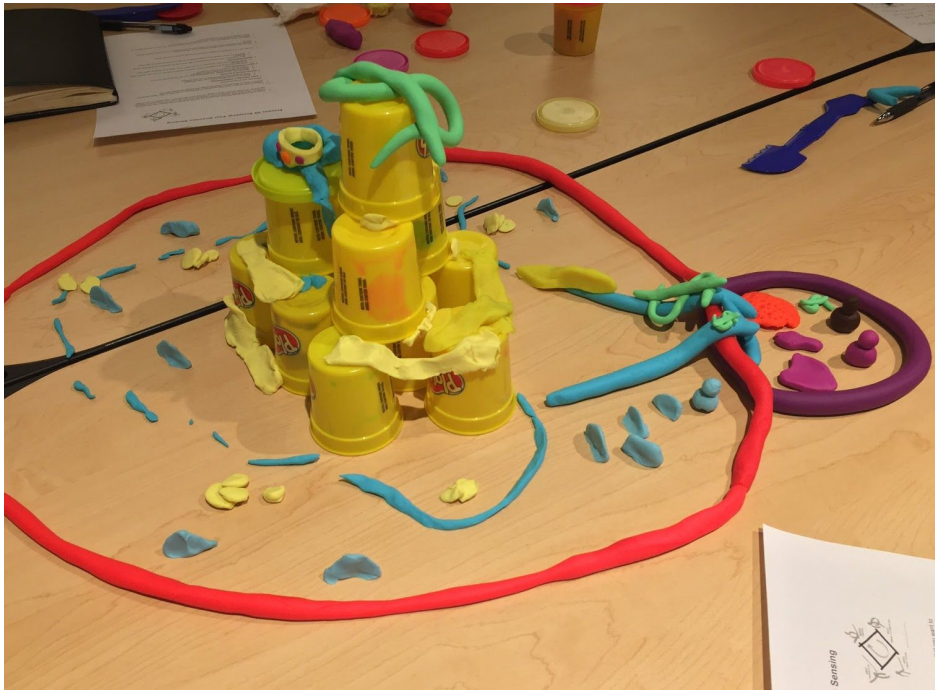

Figure 2: 3D Sculpture Created by a C4C Small Group. Photo by David Bishai.

Week 6 and 7 were devoted to participant prototypes and planning for implementation. An open floor was provided for participants to make short elevator pitches to the group about projects that would help to address aspects of Baltimore's housing problems. Over a dozen members took the floor to present to the gathered circle. There was time for brief clarifying questions about each concept and then there was a break for small group discussion and priority setting using post-it notes to keep track of ascending consensus. Two finalist ideas

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were carried over to the final session for more extensive development of implementation plans. One finalist idea was to organize an arts event to engage people with unstable housing and find out ways the typical array of government and non-government agencies could do better in helping them. The other concept was a marriage of training unutilized members of Baltimore's workforce in home rehab and implementing energy conserving design blueprints to lower the cost of improving Baltimore's housing stock.

The latter group has continued to hold together. They held widely attended dinner parties to discuss the concept and look at slides describing energy saving architectural designs. Developers and context experts remain in conversation.

Final Assignment

Pick one of the following community well-being topics: (Health disparities across race/ethnicity, Youth violence, School quality, Rats, High rates of Cardiovascular Disease, Opioid Deaths)
1) What categories of people would you invite?--be specific enough to be able to search linked in or google for them.
2) How often would you meet?
3) Design a content schedule for your meetings with 3 columns and a minimum of 6 sessions?
4) How would you evaluate the project?

Epilogue & Continuing Developments

As of August 2018, there is persisting collaboration between several C4C attendees. In one project, a group has formed that includes developers and community members, focusing on the aforementioned topic of regenerative, energy-conserving housing. Throughout April and May, they held dinners to discuss progress and possible avenues of implementation, business development, and community involvement built on what they learned from C4C. Surprisingly to them, they have attracted considerable attention from people outside of C4C who heard about their project through networks. The group is bringing in new people to advance the

project, and is preparing a business model to use to seek funding. In another project, Brendan, Ryan, and another C4C participant have begun collaborating on CLTs and are currently branching out to local nonprofits. This project includes continuing Ryan's ongoing Remington efforts, as well as developing plans to start CLTs in another Baltimore neighborhood that has easily obtainable land.

C4C appears to have impacted people in line with its original intentions: to connect ambitious, innovative leaders in housing and neighborhood development with the social capital and cross-sector collaboration they needed, to bring to life their visions of safe Baltimore neighborhoods. Their partnerships will continue to reflect C4C's lessons as they progress towards these visions.

Appendix: C4C Evaluation

Researchers from Johns Hopkins were able to evaluate C4C in three ways: 1) A quantitative measurement of the density of social networks that formed in 8 weeks; 2)A pre and post analysis of what type of members participated at baseline and endline; 3) A qualitative assessment of long term collaborations that formed and continued 4 months after C4C.

Network Analysis. UCINET was used to create sociograms of participant survey responses. Two surveys were given: one in the first two weeks of the program, which provided baseline results; and one after the program had ended. Each survey question coded the nature of recipients' relationships with each participant, with answers ranging from 0 "don't know" to 3 "know well enough to collaborate with them." These answers gave a surface idea of the number and strength of connections the C4C participants had with one another, and made it easy to measure differences in the endline survey. Not everyone answered each survey, but most of the regular participants did. After survey responses were collected, they remained coded from 0 to 3 and were converted to UCINET data. The numbers were converted into line thickness in the sociogram to indicate relationship strength between individuals, and research assistants calculated network density to measure the connectedness of the entire network.

Participant Analysis. Participants were pulsed during and after C4C. Specifically, we held in-person and Skype interviews in which we asked participants questions on a variety of topics

such as their current understanding of Theory U principles, how active listening has impacted their daily work, and if and how their vision for neighborhood development has evolved through C4C, among others. The purpose of this "thick-data" collection was to be able to analyze the effects of C4C not only in the number of new connections formed in our UCINET sociograms but also through what participants were saying and doing with these new connections.

C4C Evaluation Analysis: Issues and Concerns

Network Results. In the sociograms below, each blue square or node represents a single C4C participant. Connections to others are indicated by the arrow lines, and the strength of these connections is indicated by line thickness. People who had more connections – indicative of a more central role and voice during C4C at this time – are nodes with the most arrowheads pointing towards them. In Figure 3, which shows the baseline survey results, these central figures consisted partially of people who have worked at IHB and helped plan the C4C program, such as Michelle, Daisy, Sue, and Pres. Other participants like Ryan, while not an Impact Hub employee, was one of the most vocal and talkative participants in the C4C group, and rarely shied away from discussing his vision with participants. This led to Ryan having many fairly strong connections from the beginning of C4C, making him appear as a central figure in this sociogram. Similar things happened with other participants, such as David Bishai.

Figure 4 reveals a much more expansive network by the end of the eight weeks. Not only have the number of lines increased, but the central figures have changed, pulling in more people from outside IHB that were outside figures in the first sociogram. For example, Candace has noticeably more connections with thicker lines in Figure 4 than in Figure 3, and is closer to the mesh of central figures. This indicates successful communicating and understanding of her vision through the eyes of other participants, as well as familiarity with her work and vision – and opens the door to more collaborations.
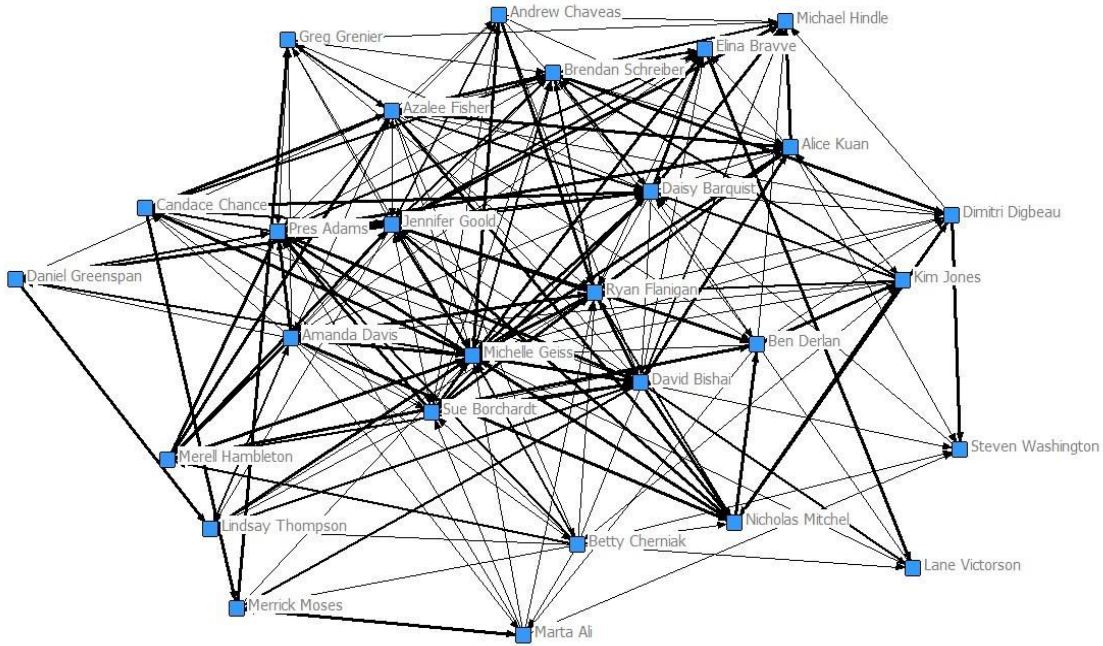
Fig. 3: Sociogram of baseline survey results. Each node is a different person, with tie strength indicated by line thickness. Figure created by Alice Kuan.
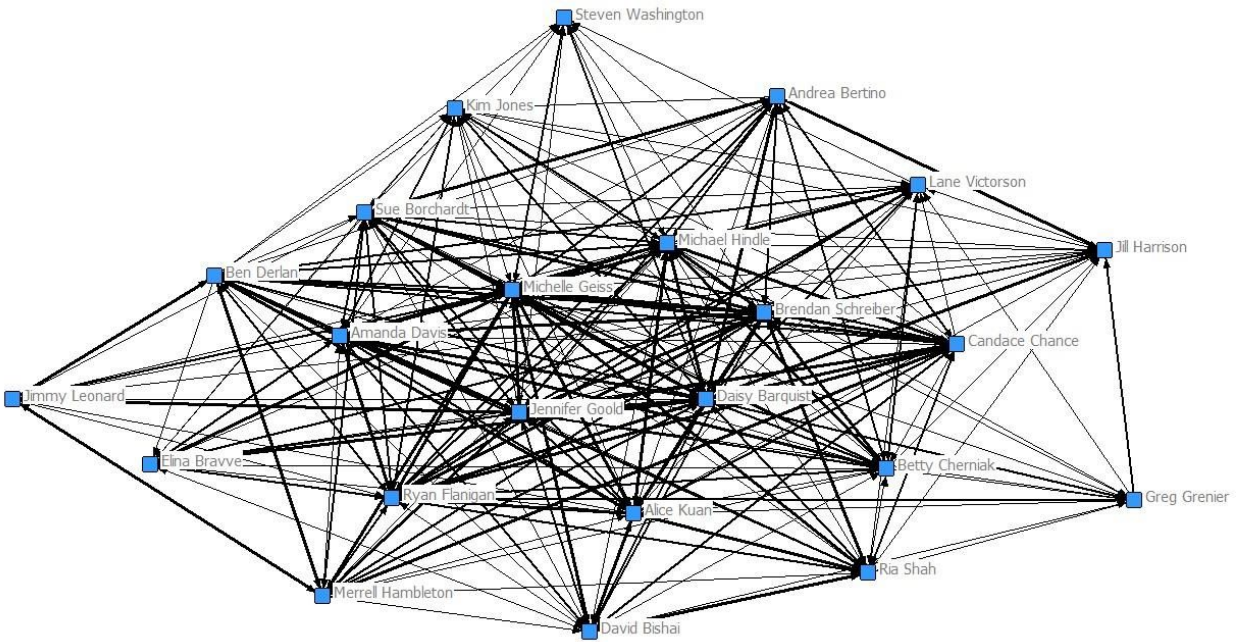

Fig.4: Sociogram of second survey (end of C4C's 8 weeks) results. Figure created by Alice Kuan.

One way to summarize the dynamic changes in the networks over time is to measure Network Density. Network density runs on a scale from a minimum of 0 where nobody is linked to anybody else to a maximum of 100 where everybody who can be linked is linked. In our setting we allowed each linked to be scored on a scale from 0 (unlinked) to 3 (collaborating). So the theoretical maximum for our analysis would be 300 implying that everybody who could be linked was collaborating directly with each other person. To avoid selection bias from comparing everybody at baseline to only those who remained, we analyzed the network density at baseline of just the 28 people who were still involved at endline. We found that the baseline network density of those who would ultimately remain involved was 52.5 out of 300 with a standard deviation of 94.5. At endline network density for these 28 was 124.3 out of 300 with a standard deviation of 107.2. Part of what increased density was the selective loss of members who did not form new links. But because the analysis was confined to only those who remained it shows that new links and new collaborations formed and this more than doubled network density.

Participant Analysis. What did participant analysis reveal? A quantitative analysis of retention in Baltimore C4C across sectors showed that the group started with broader sectoral representation than it ended with. The most well represented sector at the start was the community-development/housing sector followed by groups interested in workforce and social justice. By the end of 8 weeks the numbers from the workforce and social justice sectors had fallen, but retention was high among housing sector participants as well as those working with education and youth.

Additionally, interviews of a few participants revealed key challenges, achievements, and inspirations they had garnered over the eight weeks. Common among these topics was exemplified best by two unique stories: Brendan and Betty Cherniak. In Brendan's case, the most shocking and helpful development that resulted from C4C was how the depth of his networks considerably skyrocketed since the beginning of the program. Not only did C4C

participants bring ideas to him and his development company, but people outside C4C had caught wind of his work and began to present his firm with new projects. However, Brendan's focus was not primarily on his networks in the interview. Instead, he commented on the lessons of active listening and empathy development with awe. "When you're a for-profit in a realm that is dominated by non-profits, it's especially important to be able to bridge the gap between people's perceptions and reality and overcome preconceived notions," heremarked. "I always assumed that just putting yourself in someone's position was the best way to listen, but I found at C4C that it actually goes far deeper than that. And I really feel that I benefited from knowing how to do not only active listening, but active listening that can truly be used as a vehicle for positive change in people's lives. So, on both a personal and professional level, the emphasis on listening and doing it in a meaningful way was probably by far the most important insight I got out of it--definitely the most important."

Betty started a similar conversation on the significance of C4C's facilitated active listening model, but with a twist in her initial reaction to the program. "It wasn't like going like a class - it wasn't like that at all, this whole process," she described, recalling the first couple sessions where facilitators had encouraged everyone to practice active listening. "The material was completely new to me, I was floored. [...] But as I started to understand it a little bit, I was just dumbfounded." As C4C progressed, Betty began to connect concepts back to her own professional difficulties in leading the board of directors of the Glen Neighborhood Improvement Association. Betty had recently taken over as president when the former had stepped down, and for some reason she could not fathom, she clashed with her board at a majority of their meetings. There were racial tensions, ideological differences, divisions in what her board wanted to do for activities and what she wanted to do. Betty had never dealt with this issue before; she had long served as someone who was simply working for the association, and it was shocking to her that these clashes suddenly arose when she tried her leadership. She described having to force one of the board members out of meetings in order to plan an event without subduing difficulties - and that, she realized from C4C, was the problem.

> So we were doing what part of the Theory U is learning to listen, we did a whole session
> of learning to listen. So I felt that I was a good listener, I've actually given courses on

listening, types of listening, etc...But I started thinking about it and realized maybe I wasn't actually listening to them. So, I went into the next board meeting that we had and determined that I really had to just open up and I realized I was going in with a lot of preconceptions, like 'they don't know what they're doing', 'they're just opposition role', 'they don't like me', I had a whole bunch of stuff in my head about it. And I decided to just let my head clear, and just listen. That was a really transformative board meeting. I actually heard what they were trying to say to me all along, which was that they felt that I was doing things without consulting them, without listening to them. And they didn't really mind what I did, they just wanted to feel like they were consulted and listened to. And then I could pretty much do whatever I wanted to.

Betty's mind had been full of preconceptions on how people perceived her, which influenced how she perceived other people's actions and words. Consequently, the foundational focus on active listening and empathy in C4C was one of the biggest lessons she took away from the program, like Brendan. Throughout other participants' interviews, the two takeaways of expanding solid, collaborative networks and learning how to listen purposefully resonated with their minds the most.

Figure 5: Categories of attendees at start and end of C4C

Sectors Represented in C4C - Beginning

Impact Areas Represented in C4C - Beginning

Sectors Represented in C4C - End

Impact Areas Represented in C4C (1 per person) - End

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