

CHAPTER SIX: RECOMMENDATIONS FOR IMPROVING FOUNDATION GRANTMAKING

Role of the Foundation in the Valley

The Foundation is recognized as a significant resource for the Valley. Using its funds strategically, the Foundation can play an important role in helping Valley residents and organizations provide for the community's needs. By focusing on the Valley as a region, the Foundation can play a supportive role in fostering collaborations among organizations and encouraging more efficient and coordinated service delivery. This study should provide the Foundation with a clearer blueprint of the needs and opportunities in the Valley to make its grantmaking more informed and more likely to produce valuable outcomes for the region.

Process is Important

Because of the historical role of the Foundation in the Valley, the Foundation's process going forward is as important as the substance of its efforts. Past tensions on the use of the Gates Fund created a heightened sensitivity to the Foundation on the part of Valley leaders, residents, and the VAC. How the Foundation staff interacts with organizations and leaders in the Valley is in many ways as important as the actual grantmaking activity.

The community building theme that the Foundation has adopted is an important step in strengthening its relationship with those in the Valley. The challenge for the Foundation is to embrace a community building process in the Valley that might differ from that of New Haven and work in partnership with the VAC, a committee of its Board, to empower those in the Valley to take steps to further improve the quality of life and economic well-being of all of its residents.

Grantmaking Principles

The central focus and principles that the Foundation has developed as part of its New Directions should form the foundation of its grantmaking activities in the Valley. The central focus on community building fits the needs and opportunities of the Valley. As stated by the Foundation, "At the core of the community building approach is a commitment to developing the human, organizational, physical, and economic assets of a community for the benefit of all." This mission of community-building should guide the work of the Foundation and the VAC as they move forward.

Similarly, the principles developed as part of the Foundation's new agenda also should serve to guide the efforts in the Valley. These principles are built around the follow concepts:

- asset building;

- inclusiveness;
- regional thinking;
- broad-based support; and
- long-term investment.

In developing and implementing this core focus and these principles within the Valley, however, the Foundation needs to incorporate the following:

1. recognize that the needs and opportunities in older, small industrial cities and towns are different from those in the city of New Haven;
2. recognize that regionalism at the Valley level, versus the larger New Haven level, is appropriate for many of the collaborative efforts;
3. recognize that the Valley maintains strong ties to both Bridgeport and Waterbury and are part of those regions, as well as the Greater New Haven Region; and
4. recognize that community organizing, as well as capacity building, must be part of the Foundation's agenda in the Valley.

The following section identifies specific recommendations related to:

- grantmaking priorities;
- grantmaking process; and
- building capacity.

Refocus the Grantmaking Priorities in the Valley

Provide longer-term (i.e., one-time grants with annual performance reviews) to exemplary Valley programs and collaborations that help to advance regional services.

The Valley has demonstrated a unique ability to bring together many of its nonprofit organizations in cooperative and collaborative structures to improve the delivery of services and to attack local problems. Examples of exemplary regional initiatives include:

- the Valley Council of Health and Human Services;
- Healthy Valley 2000;
- The Umbrella;
- The Brownfields Initiative;
- Communicare; and
- the Valley Alliance for Economic Growth.

The Foundation has been supportive of these efforts to bring together several partners to improve services to the region as a whole.

These cooperative efforts typically do not have any identified stream of funding for operations, although they may be able to apply for program funding from different sources. Most of these groups have proven they have the commitment of the partners and have shown the potential to produce. The Foundation should go further in providing patient capital to these consortia, with multi-year support for organizational capacity to help sustain these efforts. This type of funding builds institutional capacity. With more sustained support and engagement, the Foundation can also help these collaboratives set concrete goals and outcomes for the community.

Provide seed funding for new ideas, feasibility, and organizing activities.

As the endowment for the community, the Foundation is a flexible resource. It can offer “venture capital” to enable existing and new groups to experiment with new ideas, test the feasibility of new approaches, and invest in organizing to bring constituents together. The Foundation has a record of supporting new initiatives from established organizations, but should reach out further to find new approaches.

The next chapter sets out a set of recommended initiatives that have emerged from the analysis of needs and opportunities in the Valley. The Foundation could support these initiatives through a special fund set aside for the implementation of projects associated with this effort.

Develop a clearer mission and funding priorities for the Valley Neighborhood Program.

The Valley Neighborhood Program, a small grants program, offers a useful resource for small, grassroots organizations and citizens' groups. However, the program does not have the clear strategic focus in the Valley that the Neighborhood Program in New Haven has achieved. It is important that the Foundation clarify the mission and priorities of the small grants program in the Valley. As part of establishing the funding priorities, the Foundations needs to more formally clarify what does and does not qualify for funding.

The small grants program in the Valley should focus on:

1. *Community organizing efforts and community building activities.* The Foundation should continue to make small grants available to citizens groups for community organizing and community building activities in the Valley. As many community foundations have demonstrated, there is an important role for small grants to help build indigenous community leadership and to stimulate civic participation. Guidelines should be developed that more clearly identify eligible projects and ensure that funds not be used for services that local government or school boards should provide with public dollars, or for equipment and activities that established organizations could pay for by community fundraising. Evidence should be provided that the grants are to be used as part of a longer-term community building or organizing effort.
2. *Small, flexible grant program for organizational capacity building.* In addition to the refined community building small grants program, there is also a need for small flexible grants to support capacity building within the nonprofit organizations serving the Valley. Greater Worcester Community Foundation has a separate pool of funds for small grants for organizational capacity, for consultants, accountants, computer and telecommunications needs, training, for established organizations to apply for without the need for the more intensive foundation review.

Further streamline the application process for the Small Grants Program.

The Greater Worcester Community Foundation has an excellent model for its small grants program. Some of the features that the Foundation could consider include:

- opening the program to more frequent decisions -- quarterly or even rolling applications that allow decisions to be more responsive to local needs; and
- further reducing the application and review process.

Undertake a more ambitious marketing and outreach effort to familiarize Valley residents and organizations with the Valley Neighborhood Program.

Once the Foundation develops clearer guidelines for the Small Grants Program in the Valley, it should work with the VAC and the Valley Program Advisory Committee on an aggressive outreach campaign that increases awareness throughout the Valley about the program.

Improve the Grantmaking Process in the Valley

Recommendations for actions that can help to improve the grantmaking process in the Valley include:

The Foundation should continue and deepen current efforts to make the process clearer and simpler.

The Foundation has made improvements in its process by adopting the Connecticut common form application and shortening the time for review of grant proposals. There is still confusion by some grantees about the application process and about what activities are eligible for grants. More frequent orientations for potential grantees and “meet the funder” events would help demystify the process for Valley organizations.

The Foundation should take steps to further strengthen relationships between Foundation staff and Valley organizations.

Philanthropy is about relationships, and for Valley nonprofits to have a better sense of the requirements and opportunities of the Foundation, they need to build stronger relationships with the Foundation staff. Foundation staff have worked at developing stronger relationships with Valley nonprofits by participating in meetings of the Valley Council, Healthy Valley, and other consortia. Now that new directions have been identified and the Foundation has presented them to the community, it should look at how it can improve the staff structure to serve the Valley.

There are at least three options that the Foundation should consider for how its staff structure could be changed to improve its relationships in the Valley. Each has advantages and disadvantages.

1. *The current structure is for all Foundation staff to become better informed about the Valley, more familiar with Valley organizations, and more accessible to the Valley.* The advantage of this model is it offers the Valley the Foundation’s whole range of expertise and ties the Foundation as a whole closer to the Valley institutionally. The disadvantage is that it can result in no staff person developing an in-depth relationship with or understanding of the Valley.
2. *Another option, one that is advocated by many in the Valley, is to have a dedicated, at least part-time, Program Officer for the Valley with a local office.* The advantage of this option is clarity in the Valley of whom to contact and increased visibility of the Foundation in the Valley. A concern is that person may be isolated from the mainstream of the Foundation’s activities.
3. *A third option is for the Foundation to hire someone from the Valley as a consultant to the Foundation to act as an intermediary for the Valley.* This position could provide support for the Foundation efforts to implement some of the findings of this report, and provide capacity building to Valley nonprofits. The advantage is it enables the Foundation to have someone local with a breadth of knowledge of the

Valley more readily able to reach out to promising organizations and initiatives. The disadvantage to this structure is it may create the perception of an external gatekeeper to the Foundation, and does not do as much to increase the visibility of the Foundation as much as options 1 or 2.

There is a need to further leverage Foundation support with other foundation, state, and federal support.

The Valley is extremely fortunate to have access to philanthropic support not only through the Foundation, but through the Katherine Matthies Foundation as well as others. The Foundation could leverage further its proactive role in collaborating with other funders in order to leverage additional resources to meet the needs in the Valley.

The Foundation should ensure that regional programs or organizations receiving grants to serve the Valley do so effectively.

As stated in the findings of this report, interviews with some of the regional organizations located outside of the Valley that have received Foundation funding found that they provided limited services in the Valley and did not do extensive outreach in the Valley. The Foundation should analyze regional programs from outside the Valley for the way they approach services in the Valley to ensure that those services are delivered effectively. Depending on the nature of the program, the grantee should demonstrate good knowledge of the Valley, sufficient outreach, and participation by Valley constituents as appropriate.

Build Local Organizational Capacity

The Foundation should develop a new initiative that seeks to build capacity among grantees and other Valley organizations.

One of the principles of the Community Building strategy is to strengthen the organizational capacity of the nonprofit sector to deliver services to the community. The Foundation has an opportunity to provide technical assistance and training to Valley organizations that can improve their potential to qualify for grants. Many community foundations have developed technical assistance programs to assist nonprofits develop their skills in fundraising, grantwriting, strategic planning, board development, and other organizational issues. A number of models have been used:

1. some have developed training programs and provided grants to nonprofits to attend outside seminars (like the Vermont Community Foundation's TAP-VT program);
2. some have created separate nonprofit management consulting services (like the Boston Foundation); and
3. some have supported and contracted with nonprofit associations to deliver training and technical assistance (like the Crossroads Community Foundation).

In designing a capacity building effort in the Valley, the Foundation should consider:

- an important place to start in the Valley is in the area of fundraising. This was the area that was found in the survey to be of most interest by respondents. Many of the smaller organizations, in particular, noted the need for assistance in grantwriting, fundraising, and marketing;
- a majority of the survey respondents noted that staff coverage and time constraints were the main barriers in term of training. Consideration should be given to providing some training assistance -- particularly around grantwriting -- on a one-on-one basis at the organizations own offices; and
- the Foundation could increase linkages between New Haven and the Valley through developing a mentoring program with New Haven nonprofit organizations. The Foundation could "pay" some of its stronger grantees in New Haven to mentor nonprofit managers in the Valley.

Further broaden the representation of the VAC and deepen the involvement of its membership.

The VAC has brought together strong representatives of the Valley to advise the Foundation. However, the committee has not had full participation from its members and attendance at meetings has fluctuated. The committee needs to find people with a strong commitment to and knowledge of the Valley and who take the responsibility seriously. Members must be informed about the Foundation, must be expected to review information on the

Foundation programs and activities and ask relevant questions, and must play a role in terms of community outreach.

The following recommendations could be considered:

- the committee should develop a “job description” outlining what is expected of each member of the VAC;
- the committee may want to consider requiring regular attendance at its meetings and replacing members who have too frequent conflicts;
- the VAC could model new approaches to leadership development by having each member identify a new person for the committee that he or she could mentor. This would help by diversifying the committee and developing a mechanism for bringing new leaders into the community; and
- to accommodate new people, the VAC needs to review the structure of its meetings, varying the time of day and day of the week, to encourage more people to participate.

In keeping with its intended purpose, the VAC could play a more active role as a “convener” of stakeholders in the Valley, an information intermediary, and a “catalyst” for new initiatives.

As noted earlier, the VAC was created to assist the Foundation in assessing community needs, to convene periodic forums of a broad range of citizens and organizations concerned with community needs in the Valley, to assist in making the Foundation’s work in the Valley better known and to proactively solicit Valley funding applications. While this purpose outlines a relatively active role for the VAC, the current role it has played is primarily reactive, monitoring the Foundation grants and ensuring accountability from the Foundation on the use of the Gates Fund for the highest priorities for the Valley.

To increase its effectiveness, the VAC can take on a more active role in achieving the intended purposes -- moving in the direction of becoming a more proactive organizer. The following is a range of options for the VAC to consider:

1. The VAC can become a more aggressive vehicle for outreach and marketing of Foundation opportunities to the Valley. This is a more activist role, helping to seek out promising organizations and programs. To date, this role has been limited to the annual event. The VAC, however, could take additional actions beyond the annual event to elicit community involvement and increase community awareness of grantmaking opportunities through the Foundation.
2. A further step would be for the VAC to help identify organizations that could take on important activities that are not being done and work with them to develop a program that would serve a community need. This role would conform to the stated purpose of “proactively soliciting funding applications.”
3. At a higher level of activism, the VAC could also become the catalyst for new initiatives, perhaps using subcommittees to convene strategy sessions with other organizations, residents, and the Foundation to plan new approaches to community problems. While the VAC would never be involved in any implementation activities,

it could provide the “table” for discussing a range of new projects and programs within the Valley. This level of activity would require more staff support, and greater vision by the committee.

To assure greater accountability to the Valley from the VAC, it should consider more structured ways to get feedback from the community on a regular basis. One method would be to convene focus groups of different constituents annually to hear about the priorities and concerns of those groups. Like the focus groups conducted by Mt. Auburn for this study, the committee could invite groups of youth, elders, low-income, etc. to meet in small groups with members of the committee to reflect on what benefits had resulted from Foundation grants and what were emerging priorities for the future.

CHAPTER SEVEN: RESPONDING TO COMMUNITY NEEDS & OPPORTUNITIES: RECOMMENDATIONS FOR REGIONAL ACTION

The Challenges and Opportunities

The Valley has a very strong infrastructure of nonprofit organizations. Its residents benefit from relatively good collaboration among leaders, an array of services that respond well to community needs, and a number of exemplary initiatives and organizations that are forward thinking and creative in their outreach. Most regions the size of the Valley do not enjoy the level of sophistication held by the Valley's civic infrastructure.

The findings that emerged from data, interviews, and the research undertaken for this project would indicate that the Valley's civic infrastructure operates at the higher end of the spectrum. There are many reasons why: local governments have started to cooperate on a more systematic fashion for the greater good of the region; Healthy Valley and the Valley Council of Health and Human Services provide two excellent examples of collaboration among many of the key organizations, institutions, and agencies in the Valley; the Economic Development Alliance is a new but demonstrable effort to coordinate economic development activity in the region; Griffin Hospital, the United Way, the Birmingham Group, and TEAM have helped organize, support, and spin-off numerous organizational and programmatic efforts designed to help specialized populations in the Valley; community organizations like the Boys and Girls Clubs, the YMCA, and Ansonia Community Action provide much-needed services to a diverse group of children and adults in the region; and the VAC has taken a leadership role in helping to effectively target Foundation resources into the region as a whole.

This kind of collective and coordinated decision-making and action puts the Valley's civic infrastructure near the top. It is a system that clearly has strong leadership, operates with a real concern for the betterment of the Valley, and most people and organizations feel comfortable with its unity of vision. In all likelihood, this civic infrastructure will continue to grow in its value and importance to the Valley.

However, just as with most community assets and decision making structures, there is always room for improvement. Therefore, based on our findings and analysis, we have developed a set of recommendations that do just that -- develop new initiatives that meet the needs of the special populations identified in the needs assessment -- the working poor and poor, minorities, the elderly and youth -- and address community-wide needs around community development and civic infrastructure.

Rather than develop a comprehensive set of recommendations addressing all of the barriers and opportunities that we identified, the recommendations are focused on a more limited set of priority issues and areas in which there are clear gaps in programs. Moreover, we are only focusing on recommendations that could and should be addressed locally. There are certain

unmet needs, as well as opportunities, that make sense to address as part of regional or statewide public policy efforts. Some issues, such as the lack of health insurance among the working poor, require statewide, if not national, policy interventions. Little can be done besides stop gap efforts to address such an issue locally. Another such issue would be the extension of subsidized child care benefits to a broader array of Valley workers. Valley healthcare providers and constituents may want to define strategies to influence state child care policy. We will focus our recommendations on those issues that can be impacted by local interventions.

Vision and Goals

The strategies that are recommended fit both the vision for the Valley as articulated by "Healthy Valley 2000" (see Appendix), as well as the goals set forth by the Foundation in its new strategic direction. Specific goals of the Foundation that guide these strategies include:

- ✦ ***Equip the residents of the region -- particularly the poor and working poor -- with the information, resources, and skills to build healthy and productive lives.***
- ✦ ***Provide residents of the region, particularly the poor and working poor, with the information, resources, and skills to become effective leaders and active participants in the civic infrastructure of their communities.***
- ✦ ***Increase investment in the region through coordinated action among the region's municipal, nonprofit and community-based sectors.***
- ✦ ***Provide nonprofit community-based structures and nonprofit organizations with the training, resources, and access required to influence policy, improve services, and reform systems.***

Strategy: Create a More Streamlined and Productive Civic Infrastructure in the Valley

The current civic infrastructure in the Valley is strong, but has evolved, rather than emerged from a formal collaborative process. In order for it to work effectively, a more strategic effort needs to take place to make it more legitimate in the eyes of those who live and work in the Valley. The Mt. Auburn consulting team feels quite strongly that the process of formalizing the civic infrastructure should include the appropriate organizations, councils, and committees in the Valley. Our role is to recommend that the process be undertaken and then it is up to the stakeholders in the Valley to address the critical issues.

Guiding Principles

There are several principles that should guide the initiatives that follow:

- Streamline the current system of councils, committees, boards, and informal organizations by consolidating some organizations and sharpening the focus of others.
- Work with the city of Shelton to make it a more active participant in the Valley's civic infrastructure.
- Create criteria for selecting people to sit on councils, committees, and boards and develop clearer guidelines for what it means to represent different constituencies in the Valley.
- Develop "job descriptions" for people who sit on councils, committees, and boards so that people know what is expected of them and there are measures upon which they can be held accountable.

Strategic Initiative #1: Hold a full-day summit in the Valley focused on creating a more efficient and streamlined civic infrastructure.

The summit could be sponsored by the Foundation, either directly or through the VAC, and include a broad-based planning and organizing committee. A great deal of forethought should be put into preparing for the summit because the issues that will be discussed are complex and possibly contentious. The guiding principles outlined above should be used to guide the planning process.

We recommend that the summit be facilitated by at least two very experienced facilitators. Each should be involved in the initial planning for the summit. Their role should be to provide ground rules for discussion and to provide a framework for discussion. Their role is not to direct or control the process as much as it is to ensure that it is relatively smooth and productive.

The focus of the summit should be on the following: the steps needed to make the civic infrastructure more formalized and explicit; representation and selection criteria for the civic

infrastructure; rules of operation and decision-making; Shelton's role in the Valley and the civic infrastructure; and attendance requirements and accountability mechanisms.

Staff and board members from all of the key organizations, business groups, agencies, councils, and committees should be invited to attend. Some form of verbal and written communication should be given in advance, indicating what the issues for discussion are and what the expected outcomes of the summit are. The more people feel informed and included, the better the chances of having a successful summit.

Strategic Initiative #2: Plan a community meeting to review this report with the Valley residents, and another community meeting one year from the release of the report.

These two events are intended to strengthen the civic infrastructure, keep the wider community informed of the issues contained in this report, and also give people and organizations an opportunity to evaluate the progress that has been made on key issues and community health indicators.

We recommend that the meetings be structured around small group discussions that focus on specific topics -- working poor, youth, workforce development, etc. This allows for substantive and disciplined discussions, and it gives people the chance to have input on the projects and programs that are central to the life of the Valley.

The Foundation should be the sponsor of each of these community meetings, perhaps along with the VAC and the other major institutions in the Valley.

Strategy: Substantially Broaden the Leadership Base within the Valley's Existing Civic Infrastructure

The leadership base within the civic infrastructure is thin and needs to be strengthened substantially. Following are guiding principles and three recommended initiatives for broadening the leadership base by bringing in corporate CEOs, younger leaders, leaders new to the Valley, and Latino leaders.

Guiding Principles

The following principles are intended to serve as a guide for organizing the three strategic initiatives that are described below:

- Engaging a new cadre of leaders and keeping them committed is a long-term and hands-on effort. It has to be sustained over time in order to succeed.
- Efforts to bring in leaders from the corporate community should not be “pitched” as doing volunteer work. Volunteer work is critically important to the lifeblood of a community, but civic infrastructure is more about leadership and creating a vibrant and healthy community. It requires leaders with vision and it requires good, critical-thinking to make sure that a community sustains itself over time. This kind of an appeal is more likely to have more success with corporate CEOs.
- When approaching younger leaders or people new to the community, the emphasis should be on preserving the kind of neighborhood, schools, quality-of-life, and amenities that keep them or attracted them to the Valley in the first place. Offering them the opportunity to be part of a process that sustains the Valley’s identity and sense of community is the approach to take.
- Clarity about the commitment that is expected of them is very important when recruiting new leaders. People want to know exactly what is expected of them and what the time commitment is.
- Because no leaders have emerged to date, this should not be interpreted as a sign that there are no Latino leaders in the community. Cultural and language differences have no doubt been contributing factors to the absence of Latino leaders.
- In order to successfully make leaders from the Latino community feel a part of the Valley’s civic infrastructure will mean involving more than just one or two leaders. Because the current civic infrastructure is so dominated by the majority culture, it will take anywhere from 10 to 12 leaders to give them a level of comfort and to make them feel that the involvement of the Latino community is a priority for the Valley.
- Also, leaders and organizations will need to make changes in the way they do business. For example, translation services may be necessary at some meetings or holding meetings in Latino neighborhoods may be required.

Strategic Initiative #1: Recruit five to ten business and corporate CEOs to serve in leadership positions within the Valley’s civic infrastructure.

As noted earlier, the active involvement of business leaders in the Valley’s civic infrastructure is weak. This initiative is intended to draw in several leaders and actively engage them in key organizations and institutions in the Valley.

The leadership for this undertaking could come from the VAC or representatives from the other principal organizations in the Valley. Wherever the members are chosen from, however, we recommend that a task force or working group of four to five people be created to oversee this effort.

We recommend that a “retail” approach to recruiting new business leaders be adopted. That is, a very personalized and one-to-one approach be used to get the attention and the commitment of business leaders. A successful recruitment effort is not “rocket science.” It simply takes time and a deliberate, personalized approach.

Before engaging the potential new leaders, the working group should do some preparation. First, the working group should familiarize itself with the key challenges and opportunities that have emerged from this report. It should be the programmatic foundation for the work of the Valley’s civic infrastructure.

The challenges and opportunities should be turned into a list of briefing or talking points that can be reviewed with prospective new business leaders. This should be done because the new leaders will likely want to know what the challenges and priorities of the Valley are and how their involvement can make a difference, before agreeing to commit themselves. The working group should then take stock of where the biggest civic infrastructure needs are. That is, the working group should know exactly where new leadership is needed, which boards or councils need representation, which programs or projects need new blood and which organizations and institutions could use a new cadre of leaders. It is essential to do this before meeting with potential new leaders because if a potential leader agrees to become involved, the working group should be prepared to suggest where a leader might be best used.

With help from the Chamber, the Valley Alliance, and the Shelton Economic Development Corporation, the working group should then develop a list of perhaps 12 to 15 companies in the Valley that have good leaders and senior managers. The working group should arrange meetings between a few working group members and each individual business person or corporate CEO (it is very important to include women and people of color). There should be a review of the key issues and challenges raised in this report and an explicit acknowledgment that new leaders are needed to strengthen the Valley’s civic infrastructure. Those who agree can be offered membership on a key board or council; those who cannot commit should be asked to appoint a senior manager in his/her place.

Strategic Initiative #2: Create a mentoring program that pairs a current leader in the Valley's civic infrastructure with someone who shows leadership potential.

This initiative is directed at building a new generation of leaders in the Valley by forming a one-to-one relationship between older, more seasoned leaders with younger people in the Valley or perhaps those individuals who simply have not been part of the existing leadership base. This is a relatively inexpensive and non-bureaucratic approach to developing new leaders, and it is an approach that has been used effectively in the business world and in communities around the country.

Mentoring programs are quite common in both the public and private sectors. For example, chambers of commerce, large corporations, and networks of entrepreneurs often develop mentoring programs to help people move up to high-level positions within the corporate ranks, or to teach someone the appropriate skills for starting and operating a business. Big Brothers and Big Sisters, as well as the Corporation for National and Community Service, have mentoring programs that are designed to give young people the tools they need to succeed in their neighborhoods and communities. The Mentoring Leadership and Resource Network offers new teachers an opportunity to learn from teachers who have spent years in the classroom. A search through the Web will show that there are mentoring institutes and networks throughout the country, and several that are offered on-line.

The programs that appear to focus more on community leadership and building civic infrastructure have a number of elements that might be useful for a mentoring program in the Valley. These programs recommend the following.

- house the mentoring program within a well-established organization in the community, one that has credibility and capacity;
- develop a clear set of goals for the program, with a timeline and benchmarks;
- organize a well-designed training program for the mentors rather than simply pairing them up with a mentee;
- hold a social event to formally kick off the program -- this provides visibility for the program and demonstrates the commitment that the community has to the program;
- carefully pair the mentor and the mentee, paying particular attention to similarities of interest and leadership styles;
- focus the mentoring program on key skill areas: leadership styles and characteristics, problem-solving, team-building, conflict management, negotiating, public communication, and organizing a community's resources;
- develop a program that encourages the mentor and mentee to meet at least two hours each week for one year, with an acknowledgment that occasional telephone or e-mail contact may be required; and
- periodically, provide leadership opportunities for the mentee in existing organizations and networks within the community to apply their leadership skills.

The United Way would be a potential organization to spearhead this initiative. It can start with VAC members. The VAC includes some of the more experienced leaders in the Valley and is, therefore, a good source of people who can serve as mentors. The VAC also is a

very extensive network of organizations, businesses, and agencies that could help identify and recruit potential leaders within the Valley. Particularly needed are people who have not had extensive involvement in the civic infrastructure: teachers, environmentalists, artists, people who work at one of the region's higher education institutions, etc.

Strategy: Make Racial and Ethnic Diversity of the Valley a Regional Strength

If a community, in the broadest sense of the word, fails to take into account the needs, interests, and contributions of a community's minority population, then it will fail. It will only function for the dominant culture and it will miss an opportunity to include the richness that racial and ethnic diversity brings to a community. Consequently, a process is being recommended to focus here not just on adding minority community leaders to key boards and councils -- it is directed at making the fabric of the Valley community a blend of different cultures.

Guiding Principles

- The effort to strengthen diversity within the Valley should be one in which the majority community takes a strong leadership position. In other words, the effort should not be seen as the responsibility just of the minority community. In order for it to succeed, it should be embraced equally by all groups.
- Leadership for this undertaking could rest with the Foundation through the VAC and directly through Healthy Valley or the United Way, but support for it should come from the highest levels of city government, the business community, the nonprofit community, churches and the minority community. The Valley and its residents need to know that this is a priority issue.
- The process for strengthening diversity and making sure that it is a central part of the civic infrastructure should be democratic and from the bottom up. It should come from the community and it should involve people who are not typically part of the organizational networks that exist in the Valley.
- A principal resource for this effort should come from the Study Circles Center of Pomfret, Connecticut. The Center has worked with urban and rural communities throughout the country, using the "study circles" democratic approach to community problem solving. Its most recent successful effort on helping to make diversity a more integral part of a community was in Hartford, Connecticut. That experience could be very helpful to the Valley.

Strategic Initiative #1: Organize and conduct a Study Circles program in the Valley that focuses on race and ethnicity.

The Study Circles approach is highly recommended because it has worked so well in so many communities across the country. As noted above, the process has worked exceedingly well in Hartford, where over 1,000 people from local government, neighborhoods, and the corporate community have taken part. People have developed a greater appreciation for the needs and perspectives of different racial and ethnic groups. Changes have been planned in a few companies around hiring and corporate culture, and efforts are now underway to broaden

these “conversations on race” to an even wider audience in greater Hartford. Also, in Fitchburg, Massachusetts, the first round of Study Circles has ended. The results have been very well received in local government and among the roughly 60 people who participated. The mayor of Fitchburg has now committed funding to carry out two additional rounds of the Study Circles next spring.

The Study Circles program is well-defined and articulated by the Study Circles Center in Pomfret. The essence of it can be briefly described.

A Sponsoring Committee is formed at the outset and includes 10 to 15 people from a cross-section of the community, typically people who are leaders, executives, or CEOs within a community. The Committee takes responsibility for organizing, promoting, and overseeing the initiative from start to finish. It sets the tone for the initiative in the community and encourages the community to take an active part in the study circles. For the Valley, the Sponsoring Committee could be the Foundation, Healthy Valley, or the United Way.

A part-time staff person is hired or appointed to carry out the administrative and logistical tasks associated with the program. This staff person is part of the glue that holds the entire program together.

The Committee recruits a group of trainers (the exact number depends on how many study circle groups are planned) who will facilitate the study circles. The trainers are critically important to the process -- they make certain that the study circles foster an atmosphere of trust, safety, and respect. Trainers receive training at no cost from the Study Circles Center.

Study circle groups of 10 to 12 people per group are then organized within a variety of institutions in the community -- city government, businesses, the schools, different neighborhoods, churches, and in community-based organizations. For the first round of study circles, or for a pilot program, the groups will generally meet five to six times over the course of two months for several hours per session.

The study circles increase sensitivity and result in a deeper appreciation for the strengths and differences among racial and ethnic groups. However, they are also intended to identify tangible strategies for better integrating majority and minority communities, and giving a more resonant voice to the minority community. Consequently, once the circles have completed their work, the strategies, recommendations, and programs that emerge are given to the Sponsoring Committee. The Sponsoring Committee then invites key individuals and institutions within a community or a region to begin implementing what the study circles have identified as community priorities.

The timeframe from the initial organizing meeting of the Sponsoring Committee to the completion of an initial round of study circles is usually three-to five-months.

Strategic Initiative #2: Identify and recruit Latino leaders to become an integral part of the Valley’s civic infrastructure.

The obvious intent of this initiative is to add more Latino representation to the Valley’s leadership base and civic infrastructure. Therefore, what follows is a recommended process that will presumably bring more Latinos into the mainstream. However, if the working group that

oversees this initiative believes that the process should be modified or abbreviated in some fashion, but capable of producing the same results (i.e., the identification and recruitment of Latino leaders), then it should feel free to make whatever changes it wishes.

A subcommittee from the VAC should be formed to direct and oversee this recruitment and organizing process. Perhaps four to six people in total should sit on the committee. In addition to VAC members, the committee should include one or two people from the Valley's Latino community -- perhaps a recognized leader, a Latino staff person from an agency or organization in the Valley, or an individual who is active in the Latino community.

To help the committee in its work, we recommend that an organizer/facilitator be hired for perhaps a few months. This individual should speak Spanish and be available to provide administrative and logistical support to the committee. The individual will also be responsible for conducting personal interviews with people in the Valley Latino community.

The committee should review a 1995 report prepared by New Paradigms Consulting on the Latino community in the Valley. Although the focus was more on the Catholic Latino community, the information would be extremely valuable as a starting point for understanding the characteristics and interests of the community. Perhaps a meeting with the one of the principals of the consulting firm would also be appropriate.

The committee should also host a meeting of Latino leaders from the New Haven and Bridgeport areas, as well as Latino staff or board members from the Foundation. This group could comment upon and embellish the information contained in the 1995 report noted above. The group would also be helpful in developing a protocol or process for this effort to build Latino leadership. Taking the time to think the process through with this group would be immeasurably useful. This group is also likely to have contact with leaders and individuals who make up the Valley's Latino community and would, therefore, be helpful in identifying people to interview.

The list of key people to interview within the Valley's Latino community should be developed from the contacts that emerged from the meeting of New Haven and Bridgeport leaders. The list can also be developed by talking to pastors and ministers in Latino churches (Catholic and Pentecostal), employers in the Valley (a number of employers that were interviewed for this project employ people from the Latino community), public school principals and teachers, and locally-elected officials who have experience with the Latino community.

One-on-one interviews with people in the Latino community should then be held, interviewing perhaps as many as 12 to 15 individuals. These interviews should focus on the effort to bring more Latinos into the Valley's civic infrastructure, and the need to identify leaders in the Latino community that can serve on key councils and commissions. Asking the interviewees what the barriers are for successfully engaging people from the Latino community and what it would take to overcome those barriers would also be important to ascertain.

Once the interview has been completed, a meeting should then be held with all of the people who were interviewed, hosted by the committee. This gives the committee and the individuals who were interviewed an opportunity to hear about the results of the interviews and discuss the implications for building more Latino representation into the Valley's civic

infrastructure. A process should then be created to place Latinos on the appropriate boards and commissions.

Once the new Latino leaders have had an opportunity to sit on boards and commissions for perhaps 8-10 months, the planning committee should host a meeting with these individuals to determine how the process is going and decide what changes, if any, should be made to sustaining the involvement of Latino leaders.

Strategic Initiative #3: Create a Translator Pool within the Valley Council to serve the needs of non-English speaking residents.

Few health and human service providers in the Valley have on staff individuals with the capability of speaking the many languages of residents of the Valley. While the clearest gap is in the area of Spanish speaking staff, there are other language barriers that arise. This affects such big institutions as Griffin Hospital, as well as the smaller organizations. The Valley Council should identify staff amongst all of its constituents that speak other languages. The agencies should form a cooperative agreement for sharing translation resources. For example, if one agency is sending out a newsletter, it could be translated into Spanish by one of the members of this “translator” pool. The Foundation could provide funding to support the additional overhead costs for these individuals.

Strategy: Create a Strategic Approach to Workforce Development that Benefits the Poor and Working Poor

This goal addresses the need to organize the region around workforce development so that it can more effectively reach the poor and working poor. The Valley, as most communities, has yet to integrate efforts to train and develop the workforce with efforts to strengthen existing business and attract new businesses to the region. There are many benefits to creating an effective linkage between workforce development and economic development. In general, workers are trained for jobs that are already available in the economy, workers feel more empowered by the skills they are receiving, and training providers gain confidence from industry because they are training people ready-made for the market.

Guiding Principles

The following are intended to serve as guiding principles for organizing the three strategic initiatives that are described below:

- The Education and Training Task Force of the Greater Valley Chamber of Commerce has built a good foundation upon which to proceed with workforce development initiatives in the Valley. However, the Task Force needs staffing capacity and resources to carry out the following initiatives listed below.
- The Valley needs to coordinate its plan with stakeholders in the Bridgeport, New Haven, and Waterbury regions. It is clear that many Valley residents take advantage of the jobs in these abutting labor market areas. The growth and employment opportunities in these LMAs need to be taken into full consideration by the Valley.
- Workforce development initiatives need to involve both the demand side (employers and business organizations) and supply side (education and training providers, schools, universities, and labor organizations).

Strategic Initiative #1: Develop a Valley workforce development plan.

Mt. Auburn recommends that the Education and Training Task Force begin a workforce development planning process. The planning process should focus on an analysis of the workforce development system, a clearer understanding of the needs of the business community and labor force, and a few carefully selected initiatives to begin a Valley workforce development agenda. Below are three steps to achieve this end.

1. *The Task Force's core of critical leaders should undertake an analysis of the Valley's workforce needs, its education and training capacity, the implications of changing workforce development policy (such as WIA and welfare to work), connections to workforce institutions and resources in the three abutting regions*

- (New Haven, Bridgeport, and Waterbury), and links between workforce development and economic development.* The analysis should be undertaken with leaders from the business community and business organizations, training and service providers, economic development professionals, and labor organizations.
2. ***Develop a Valley Workforce Development Plan.*** The plan should include clear goals, desired outcomes, responsible parties, a timeline, and a number of initial projects to get started. In developing its plan, the Task Force should take into consideration regional policy and economic opportunities beyond the Valley's boundaries. Therefore, the Task Force should meet with and test its plan with stakeholders such as The Workplace, New Haven Growth Partnership, area community colleges, the New Haven Department of Social Services, and appropriate statewide employment and training offices.
 3. ***Hold a Summit with the Final Plan.*** The previous steps should culminate in a Valley-wide summit to announce the Task Force's plan, gain buy-in from the larger community, and build momentum for its first initiatives.

Strategic Initiative #2: Launch a demand-driven training program.

Mt. Auburn recommends that the Education and Training Task Force of the Greater Valley Chamber of Commerce (with the involvement of a few key employers and Naugatuck Valley Community College) develop “demand-driven” training programs that more effectively meet the workforce needs of the Valley's emerging industries. The goal behind this initiative is threefold: first, it creates a workforce development-economic development link and can serve as a foundation for future linkage; second, it meets the needs of Valley employers while also training underemployed Valley residents for the new job opportunities among Valley employers; and, third, it engages higher education more substantially in the Valley by creating a viable and profitable training program that will need to bring Naugatuck Valley Community College to the Valley.

For years, the ability of education and training providers to keep pace with new skill needs of business and to respond to them appropriately was weak or marginal at best. Education and training providers did not pay enough attention to the extraordinary changes that were taking place in the new economy. As traditional jobs and labor markets were changing dramatically, training providers around the country continued to train people for jobs that no longer existed or whose skill requirements had changed substantially. The mismatch between the skills companies needed from their workers and the skills that workers were receiving from education and training providers was significant.

In the early to mid 1990s, these circumstances began to change somewhat. The more enlightened education and training providers began to realize that the workforce needs of employers had gone through a metamorphosis. Rather than simply make adjustments in their training programs, they started to develop partnerships with industry. Providers began to ask companies directly what they needed from training programs; what skills need to be taught; what equipment should be used during the training; how many hours of instruction are needed in certain skill areas; and what other aptitudes are necessary. Employers were also asked to take an

active part in planning the training. A demand-driven approach to workforce development started to take shape.

There were many benefits to this new paradigm. As the education and training providers pursued this approach, industry gained confidence in the providers, workers were better equipped for the demands of the new workplace, and workers felt more empowered by the skills they were receiving. Also, education and training providers found that they had a ready-made market for the people they trained -- industry was so pleased with the results of this demand-driven approach that they were eager to take graduates of training programs.

We recommend a similar approach as a way to better meet the needs of Valley employers and workers, but also as a way to secure more engagement from the NVCC. In general, community colleges have been one of the critical institutions in demand-driven training programs. The timing for such an approach is ideal: a whole host of companies in the Valley is desperate for workers and would quickly hire people who were well trained. NVCC would also likely have more of a presence in the Valley if this initiative was organized and there was a committed group of stakeholders in the Valley.

Examples of successful demand-driven approaches with community colleges exist all over the country as well as close to home. In fact, NVCC is involved in a successful program with the screw machine industry in Waterbury. This example, along with others highlighted below, could be models for the Valley.

- A very comprehensive training program has been developed for the screw machine industry in greater Waterbury, Connecticut. NVCC, the adult education department of the city, and a core leadership group from industry, purchased a 10,000-square-foot building and dozens of machines, and created a training program for incumbent and entry-level workers that is one of the most successful models in the Northeast.
- A training program for precision machining companies in greater Hartford was developed by three community colleges, led by Capital-Technical Community College. Approximately 150 entry-level workers were trained, and the majority of those individuals were hired by companies in the region. The program is so successful that a Precision Machine Institute has been created and companies are asking the colleges to offer incumbent worker training and upgrading.
- A demand-driven program was developed for the paper industry in Holyoke, Massachusetts. The program, called Working Knowledge, was created with extensive industry involvement, and it will focus on skills upgrading and career development in the industry.
- A number of demand-driven training programs have been developed through the Casey Foundation's Jobs Initiative. Six cities around the country are participating in the initiative and demand-driven programs have been created in the automotive, electronics, healthcare, metalworking, and aerospace industries. Each has a community college that plays a critical role in the partnerships.

The Task Force should work with NVCC to extend this organizing approach to the Valley. There are several steps involved in this approach.

1. ***Work with key sectors.*** It is easier to define a critical mass of occupations and skills around which a training program can be constructed when groups of companies with similar needs and interests are involved. Also, it is possible to develop economies of scale when dealing with a multitude of companies with similar employment and training needs.
2. ***Become familiar with the nature of a given sector, as well as the workforce and labor market trends occurring in these sectors.*** This information helps education and training providers get a better understanding of the macro forces that are shaping the sector, and offers a picture of the key issues and challenges the sector faces. Conducting this research also sends a message to companies within a sector that education and training providers are serious in their efforts to be responsive to industry needs.
3. ***Discussion with individual CEOs and senior managers within a sector is an important step in the organizing process.*** These meetings are a means of information-gathering about the different skills, occupations, and workforce needs within a given sector. They help quantify the opportunities for training and upgrading, and they begin to build trust between industry leaders and people from the education and training system.
4. ***Once the relevant skills and training needs have been identified, a meeting should be held with a small group of CEOs and senior managers from industry.*** Provide them with a summary of the individual meetings and outline the kind of training programs that respond to their needs. The idea is to develop a training curriculum, identify outcomes for the training programs, determine the kind of equipment or technology that should be used during the training, and decide if on-the-job experiential learning opportunities should be built into the program. These meetings can often be very time-consuming and CEOs are likely to turn over some of the responsibility for program development to HR directors. Nonetheless, the meetings are an important element in developing a true partnership with industry, and industry will feel much more of a sense of ownership of the program if they are actively engaged.
5. ***When the outline for a training program has been well defined, it is then time to turn to the education and training providers and NVCC to decide on the specifics of the training delivery --*** what specific curriculum should be used, what facilities are needed, which instructors should be retained, and how the program will be funded.

This process should take between nine months and one year. While this may seem to be a longer timeframe than is needed, it is much more effective to be deliberate and thoughtful. Costly mistakes or shortcuts at the beginning of the process can create serious problems in the long-term. The workforce development working groups should also be careful to use the lessons learned from Connecticut's industry cluster initiative and other related initiatives such as CBIA's industry skill surveys.

Strategic Initiative #3: Design career ladders for the underemployed.

Mt. Auburn recommends that the Task Force pursue a career ladders program as its third initiative. Career ladders lift entry-level jobs to higher professional responsibility and increased earnings. The career ladder program should work with appropriate industry representatives and organizations such as CBIA to develop key competencies that credential work experience and education in a given skill area. We have proposed a few elements that could be the basis of a career ladder program in the Valley.

1. While many Valley residents will need hands-on training and assistance to move along a career track, others can be assisted simply by learning more about how to access job opportunities and resources available to them. The Chamber's Education and Training Task Force should encourage the Ansonia Job Center to create a Valley specific career guide that can be updated daily and be published on Electronic Valley. The career guide should use existing inventories and resource books in the Valley and state, and gain agreement among existing organizations to centralize and accept one master career guide. The guide should include: a description of career opportunities and qualifications in local industries; a directory of human resource departments of large employers in the Valley; a listing of relevant career education and job training resources, including internal corporate training programs, educational institutions, and public and private sector training organizations; and self-assessment tools to help users narrow their career focus. In order to drive job seekers to the site, it should not only be extremely user friendly, but also become a community database for job openings. In essence, the job posting component of the career guide would replace the newspaper's on-line job posting because it would be Valley-specific. It may also derive some income by charging local companies a minimal fee to post job openings.
2. Certain sectors within a regional economy will always be on the lower end of the job scale -- fast food, retail, certain kinds of hospitality, and even some light assembly. Other sectors will generally offer higher quality, higher-paying jobs -- those in manufacturing, technology, engineering services, and some in healthcare. Too often, however, people who work in low-quality jobs remain in them or have no clear path for gaining access to higher-paying jobs. The low-end jobs frequently require little or no training. Consequently, people who work in fast food businesses or retail have few marketable skills to help them once they leave an employer.

To change this dynamic to the advantage of employers as well as employees, a partnership between low-end and high-end employers could be created to help workers make the transition from low-paying to better-paying jobs. The partnership could start by identifying and articulating the skills a worker will need in order to be employed by high-level employers. Once the skills are identified, the employers in low-end occupations would be expected to help workers gain those skills. In effect, the low-skill employers would structure their workplace in such a way that their businesses become a training and skill development laboratory. These employers would create a one-to-two-year training program to help their workers gain mastery over a variety of job-related skills and aptitudes: customer service, punctuality,

computer proficiency, working in teams, problem-solving, etc. A certificate would be given to those workers who gain the skills, and that certificate would provide access to employment in higher-wage, higher-skilled occupations. In this framework, low-end jobs would be viewed as a step toward a better job rather than a dead end. Employers at the low end could conceivably find it easier to attract employees if there was a genuine opportunity for advancement to a quality job. The emphasis on quality jobs is key here, as is the intensive involvement of employers. If employers on both ends are not fully committed to the idea, it simply will not work. The community college could also play an important role in helping to articulate and define the sequence of skills that would be at the foundation of the system.

3. A manufacturing firm in Illinois, Fed-Pro, has created a very sophisticated and multi-level system for helping its workers gain access to higher-paying, higher-skilled jobs. It does this by emphasizing careers and continuous education. The organizational centerpiece is the Career Development Center. Fed-Pro hired two professionals to run the Center. The Center is located within the company and it operates during working hours. Through the Center, workers are asked about their long-term interests and tested for their skills. An individualized plan is then developed for any employee who wants to advance within the company.

Other services are available to workers who may only be interested, in the short-term, in moving to a higher-paying job rather than getting on a career track. These workers receive specialized training and assistance in finding jobs that fit well with their specific interests and skills. As a means of encouraging workers to supplement their skills or gain an educational degree or diploma, the company provides prepaid tuition for any worker who enrolls in an education or training program. Furthermore, the services of an educational advisor are available to any worker who needs help navigating through the educational or training system. General remedial courses are also offered in-house in math or English. This comprehensive, multi-level approach has created a culture in the company that aggressively focuses on quality jobs and a quality work environment.

Strategy: Create a More Comprehensive Approach to After-School Activities and Community Services for the Valley's Youth

Despite renewed commitment and attention to the Valley's in-schools activities, there remains widespread concern over the lack of teen activities and after-school programs serving the Valley's youth. This strategy aims to strengthen the relationship between what goes on in school and what goes on after school.

Mt. Auburn's findings and analysis of the Valley's youth and its infrastructure is the basis for a set of recommendations outlined below. The recommendations address the fundamental divide between in-school and after-school activities by establishing a Valley youth collaborative and transforming schools into community learning centers. First, a number of principles guide the recommendations.

Guiding Principles

- Public schools are central institutions in the life of any community and are underutilized. In addition to fulfilling their core mission of educating youth and teaching them the skills to become successful adults, schools also can function as a place where these lessons and skills are taught beyond the classroom atmosphere.
- The initiatives should foster communication and collaboration among the Valley's public schools and the Valley's youth service providers.
- Any new development in school policy needs to gain buy-in from the administration and teaching staff. In other words, any new initiative involving the schools should include input from those assuming leadership in the schools on a day-to-day basis.
- Youth should also be involved in planning for services and activities. It is critical that youth have input into the programs that will be developed for their benefit.

Strategic Initiative #1: Establish a Valley-wide youth collaborative.

There are two primary institutional vehicles that coordinate the Valley's in-school and after-school youth activities: the regional superintendents' meeting for the public schools and the meeting of the Children's Team subcommittee of the Family Violence Task Force. Both of these groups are appropriate vehicles to address issues in their own areas of concern. However, Mt. Auburn proposes that the two groups establish a joint subcommittee that acts as a Valley-wide Youth Collaborative. The Collaborative should be a mechanism to establish better collaboration and coordination. Below are a number of steps that should be taken to establish the Youth Collaborative .

1. ***Appoint representatives to the Youth Collaborative.*** The collaborative should have a working body of six to eight people -- large enough to represent a diversity of interests, yet small enough to tackle substantive issues. An equal number of representatives from the Valley Superintendent's meeting and the Children's Team should participate.
2. ***Examine opportunities, recognize best practices, and establish priorities for action.*** As one of its first steps, the collaborative should take a comprehensive look at the opportunities and gaps that exist between in-school and after-school activities in the Valley. The collaborative should also highlight those best practices in the region where some of this gap has already been bridged (such as mentoring programs currently operating in some of the Valley schools).
3. ***Increase agency involvement in the Children's Team.*** A relatively new coordinating body, the Children's Team does not have widespread participation from the area's youth providers. One of the first steps to assure proper representation is to increase the involvement of other key programs that reach out to the Valley's youth such as the Boys and Girls Club, Valley YMCA, Tinney Community Center, and Ansonia Community Action.

Strategic Initiative #2: Turn public schools into community learning centers.

Public schools are central institutions in the life of any community. First and foremost, the role of the public schools is to ensure that the youth in the community have the skills required to function successfully as adults. Public schools can also become a critical resource in efforts to build after-school activities and programming. Most school facilities in the Valley, as in most communities, are underutilized. The schools should join with those community, faith-based, and private resources that can provide after school access to the Valley's schools. Ansonia's new public high school is emerging as a model for the Valley in this regard. Its state-of-the-art facilities and willingness to open itself up to community access is a step in the right direction. Ansonia's high school as well as the Valley's other schools could consider two options.

1. ***Create a Community in School program.*** The national "Community in Schools" program works with local stakeholders to link community services with young people in their schools. The program elements include counseling/supportive guidance, health and human services, parental involvement, pre-employment activities, enrichment activities, and educational enhancement. All of these elements are aimed to keep youth engaged in developmentally appropriate activities for the duration of the day.
2. ***Integrate Community Services with Schools.*** Many community services now located in other areas can move within the school. Health and human services can have a field office within the school. Community service providers can work closely as a key actor in a partnership with teachers, principals, volunteers, parents, and students.

Strategic Initiative #3: Establish business-education partnerships throughout the Valley, as a means of strengthening and enriching the educational experience of young people in the K-12 school systems.

School districts and individual schools across the country have initiated different kinds of business-education partnerships, some quite extensive and involving entire school systems and a group of business partners, others on a more modest scale that involve a single school or classroom and a business partner. All, however, are directed at giving young people in the K-12 grades added resources and a new set of learning tools that enhance the educational experience.

The popularity of these partnerships has grown for several reasons. Educators and business people have begun to recognize that the future of a region's economy depends on the aptitudes and skills of the people who live in the region. Investing in young people and their schools, therefore, is viewed as a critically important undertaking for maintaining a healthy and viable community. Secondly, educators realize that giving students firsthand exposure to the business world can make the learning process more applied, and it introduces them to jobs and careers that exist right in their own community. And, finally, for school systems that are resource-poor, business-education partnerships are increasingly seen as a means of gaining access to resources for students that would otherwise be out of reach.

Regardless of the motivation for forming business-education partnerships, however, educators and business people believe that the partnerships can make a critical difference to the educational lives of public school students.

In light of this, school systems and businesses in the Valley should be strongly encouraged to form business-education partnerships. At the moment, the linkage between schools and businesses in the Valley is sporadic and not as institutionalized as it should be. As a consequence, school systems and students in grades K-12 are missing an opportunity that could significantly enhance the educational process.

In order to form productive partnerships, Valley schools and businesses could do the following.

First, the Valley should adhere to a set of principles that have guided other successful business-education partnerships. These principles include the following:

- Think of the partnership as a long-term, institutional relationship between a school system or a school and the business community. It is not a one-time project or program. Effective partnerships are those that are looked at in terms of years rather than weeks or months.
- Look at business-education partnerships as more comprehensive than school-to-work (STW) initiatives. The STW program is an important undertaking, but it is somewhat more narrowly focused, while the partnerships are more institutional and broad-based.
- Develop a partnership around mutual self-interest. Schools have something to give and gain from the relationship, as does the business community. Partnerships that are built on self-interest rather than charity or do-goodism are the ones that last.

- Look at the partnership as a means of building trust between the schools and the business community. Trust will not happen immediately; it takes time and the process cannot be short-circuited. Once trust has been established, partnerships are then more fluid and productive.
- Establish a clear contract at the outset of the partnership that outlines responsibilities for both parties, and make adjustments over time. Having a contract keeps both parties united and focused on a tangible and well-defined path.
- Schools will have to invest in the partnership in order for it to work. Staff time and resources will have to be committed. Schools and school systems that leave the operation and maintenance of the partnership to the business community will not endure.
- Make the involvement of teachers a key element of the partnership right from the beginning. Teachers will feel more of a sense of ownership of the partnership if they are treated as partners. Teacher training and development should also be an integral part of the partnership.
- Focus on key educational and skills-based outcomes for the partnership. Fundamentally, young people will be the beneficiaries of the partnership if their educational needs and interests are the driving force of the partnership.

Second, the Valley Chamber's new Education and Job Training Task Force might be the logical group to lead this effort. Or, perhaps a sub-set of that group could provide the initial leadership and organizing support.

Third, Partners in Education could be used as a resource (www.partnersineducation.org). Partners in Education is a national organization whose mission is to help local school systems create business-education partnerships. Since its inception, the organization has helped start thousands of partnerships in every region throughout the United States. Partners in Education has staff and a good number of booklets and manuals that can assist schools and their business partners. Technical assistance is also available from staff to any school or system that becomes a member of the Partners in Education network.

Finally, the Valley could use the programmatic experience of numerous existing business-education partnerships as a guide to forming its own partnership. These programs are at the heart of most partnerships and they can give the Valley an idea of what has worked in other parts of the country.

- ***Specialized Academies:*** Some schools have worked with their business partners to create academies that focus on specialized subject areas and career tracks. For example, Boston has a Finance Academy that introduces students to careers in the financial services industry. Students take their standard classes and mix them with courses and practicums in finance. Academies also exist in other cities for the hospitality and healthcare industries.
- ***Principal-for-a-Day:*** A few schools in New York have developed a program with their business partners in which a business CEO will take on the responsibility of being a principal in a school for a day. The experience generally gives the CEO an opportunity to better understand the challenges of working in and improving a school

system. When businesses are asked to provide assistance they would presumably have a clearer appreciation for the culture of schools and school reform.

- **Technology Integration:** IBM has taken a very aggressive partnership role with schools and school systems around the country by helping them to better integrate technology. Hardware and specialized software programs are offered that make it possible for schools and systems to create internal networks, upgrade telecommunication systems, track and integrate data, and exploit the use of multi-media in the school curriculum.
- **Mentoring:** Mentoring programs have taken two forms in some of the business-education partnerships that have been formed. One program pairs a superintendent of schools with a CEO from a local business. The CEO essentially provides the superintendent with pro bono advice on a range of business management topics and systems that are designed to streamline the operation of a school system. Other mentoring programs pair employees of a company with students in the K-12 grades. The best of these latter programs match student needs and interest with an employee's skills and capabilities.
- **Scientists in the Classroom:** Technology-related firms will often arrange for their scientists to work intensively with teachers and kids in science classes. Teachers and kids benefit when the scientists can bring in real-world experiments and applications to the science curriculum. Some business-education partnerships have focused extensively on this program.
- **Teacher Externships/Internships:** Businesses in some communities offer summer internships to teachers. A good example is found in Shelton where the Externship for Education Program was created in 1996. The key is to match a teacher's interests and subject matter strengths with the right business. It can involve teachers of industrial subjects working in a manufacturing plant, teachers of chemistry working in a chemical or pharmaceutical facility, or teachers of art working in an art gallery or with an artists' collective. The intent here is to give teachers more ideas about their teaching and make the curriculum content more applied and relevant to kids.
- **Awards and Recognition:** Without compromising educational integrity or sacrificing learning to rewards, some schools and businesses have developed awards and special recognition events for kids who excel in core academic subjects or in extracurricular services and activities. The best of these programs find ways to acknowledge a very diverse range of kids and affirm those who are often left out of the academic and athletic mainstream. In some instances, awards or recognition are given to students who devote afternoons to community service, students who tutor other students, or students who have shown the greatest improvement in math or the humanities. The intent of these programs is to focus well-deserved attention on kids who, when given the right kind of encouragement, can excel.

Other program models exist. The Valley can draw from or build upon these "best practices" of other business-education partnerships or create its own unique programs as well.

Strategy: Create Efficient Systems of Service Delivery among the Valley's Senior Centers and Extend Services to Isolated Shut-ins

Special attention needs to be given to the senior citizen population in the Valley. While programs and services are available, a more efficient system should be put in place.

Guiding Principles

- The basic infrastructure of senior services in the Valley does not need to be greatly altered. The issue is more of creating awareness of current programs and collaboration among providers.
- Seniors should have input into the decision making process for any alterations in the landscape of senior services. It is important to create buy-in and empower seniors to recognize their needs and opportunities for a better quality of life.

Strategic Initiative #1: Host a special senior citizen planning session in the Valley.

As mentioned earlier, the Valley has a good foundation of senior services and programs. Still, there are a few areas where there are resource gaps or where seniors remain disconnected from resources. The Valley Council of Health and Human Services provides an appropriate forum where some of these issues can be raised and addressed. Most of the key stakeholders in the delivery of senior services are already represented on the Council. In addition, other service providers that do not deal directly with seniors, but are human and social service providers serving other populations, may also have resources, programs, and/or experiences that could inform a structured discussion and planning session on seniors.

Mt. Auburn recommends that the Valley Council of Health and Human Services host a special senior citizen planning session during one of its regularly scheduled monthly meetings. The session could be the primary agenda item for one of these meetings, or it could be the second half of one meeting dedicated solely to this issue. What follows are three items that could fill the agenda of this session.

- ***Identification of needs and opportunities.*** The session could use this report and its findings of senior citizens in the Valley as a starting point for discussion. The group could review the findings, make additions and corrections, and prioritize the issues raised. In essence, this part of the forum would highlight the services already provided in the Valley and alert the group to new opportunities and gaps.

- ***Cross-area collaboration.*** One of the primary barriers to better senior services in the Valley is lack of coordination among senior centers and between senior centers and other senior services. The Council meeting could serve as an opportunity for these stakeholders to discuss better ways to collaborate, coordinate schedules and services, and share resources. This discussion will not only be important for those directly involved in delivery of senior services, but also other health and human service organizations. Out of this broader discussion could also come some opportunities to collaborate across areas. For example, those involved in youth services may identify some opportunities for multi-generational initiatives. Or, those involved in providing senior transportation may identify opportunities with other constituent groups in need.
- ***Meeting the needs of shut-ins.*** The agenda for the Council meeting could also address specific issues of immediate concern to the Valley's senior citizens. One clear issue is outreach to senior shut-ins. The special session could brainstorm to come up with solutions to this problem. For example, one such solution may to combine the infrastructure and organization of the Parish Visiting Nurse Program with TEAM's ElderCare Outreach and Support staff. Another solution may be to use some of the senior center resources to create one Valley-wide adult day care facility to accommodate less independent seniors with more structured, professional care during the day. In terms of the level of care, adult day care facilities fit between senior centers that cater to extremely self-sufficient seniors, in-home care that exacerbates isolation, and nursing home facilities that cater to more dependent seniors.

A special session such as this should be hosted by the Valley Council of Health and Human Services at least yearly. This allows for some autonomy among service providers without creating another umbrella organization, yet provides enough structure to keep the Council attuned to system-wide issues.

Strategy: Increase Intermunicipal Cooperation around a Range of Development Issues that Affect the Communities of the Lower Naugatuck Valley

Strategic Initiative #1: The Valley Regional Planning Agency, working with area residents and business people, should develop a plan to protect and sustain the region's natural environment.

Although the environment was not a principal focus of this strategic economic development plan, it is a very important component of the regional economy and, therefore, deserves attention. Any economic development strategy that is put in place should have a very strong environmental planning and protection component. Sustained growth and economic viability will increasingly depend upon the region's ability to protect the natural resource base. The region has benefited extensively from this precious resource and it should be preserved at all costs.

In a 1995 study by the National Park Service entitled, "Economic Impacts of Protecting Rivers, Trails and Greenway Corridors," Corporate CEOs indicated that quality of life is the third-most important factor in locating a business. A 1996 report by Arthur Andersen Consulting found that, after schools, quality of life and access to recreation ranked highest among the criteria for deciding where companies will locate. Preserving and sustaining this natural environment, therefore, is critically important to Naugatuck Valley residents and businesses. Making sure that proper zoning and land use ordinances are in place and respected is imperative to the long-term future of the region. Dealing effectively with pressures of development is also essential.

Communities and regions around the country have developed innovative strategies to protect and sustain their environment. We recommend that the Valley Regional Planning Agency create a Task Force to examine the "state of the current natural environment," quantify the environment's economic contribution to the region, identify threats to the natural environment, and then develop a series of initiatives that will sustain the region's natural assets.

Strategic Initiative #2: Fund a pilot regional project initiative.

The Foundation should develop an initiative that focuses specifically on projects that involve cooperative efforts or resource sharing amongst the municipalities in the Valley. This effort should be proactive. The Foundation could, in fact, issue an RFP requesting proposals from municipalities in the region that involve some level of resource sharing.

Through this project, a number of ideas for regional projects emerged. They include:

1. Groups of municipalities within the Valley could negotiate inter-municipal agreements for joint development and financing of industrial parks and sites that generate cross-municipal economic benefits.

There are a number of examples of inter-municipal agreements for the funding and development of industrial sites that Valley municipalities could emulate. These include the following:

Smart Park in Augusta/Waterville Maine: In the Augusta/Waterville area of Maine, cities and towns are joining together to build a Smart Park. They are sharing both the costs and benefits of this development through an innovative tax-sharing arrangement that includes more than 25 municipalities. The state of Maine has played a crucial role in this development, and similar developments in the state, by offering money to municipalities that join together to promote regional economic development. The Kennebec Regional Development Authority is acting as the developer of the industrial park. Any city or town in the area can become a member of the authority. With approval of the members, the authority issues bonds that pay for the cost of developing the site. In any year that there is not sufficient income from site operations or land sales to cover debt service on the bonds and operating costs, member municipalities must cover a pro-rata share of the shortfall. Each municipality's share is computed on the basis of its "state valuation" as a percentage of the sum of all member municipalities valuations. The future property taxes generated by the site are also distributed to the members in this manner.

The Smart Park is to be developed in phases over the course of at least 20 years. The financial projections show that members will need to cover costs on the project for the first six years of operations. By year 11, the municipalities will have recouped their investments. By year 20, the members are projected to be sharing \$2.2 million in taxes per year.

The total development costs are projected to be \$11.7 million, with the first phase costing \$5.2 million. One million dollars is covered by a grant from the state of Maine that was awarded on a competitive basis. The purpose of the state grant competition was to foster coordination between municipalities on large economic development projects. The region also sought a \$1 million grant from the federal Economic Development Administration. The remaining costs are to be covered by bonds backed by the municipalities.

Lewiston and Auburn, Maine -- Tax Sharing on Multiple Projects: The two cities of Lewiston and Auburn in Maine started a tax sharing program in 1979, and have been increasing the amount of city-to-city cooperation ever since. Their first tax sharing project was an industrial park near the jointly controlled Lewiston-Auburn Airport. Together, the cities received a federal Economic Development Administration grant and they both contributed funds for a required match. Because both had paid to develop the project, they agreed that both should receive the benefits of development on the site. Therefore, while Auburn, the host city, receives 30 percent of the tax revenue for service provision, the remaining 70 percent is split 50/50. The bonds were completely paid off in 10 years, and both communities now realize \$120,000 per year in tax proceeds from the park.

The project also involved extending utilities to the site. This provided additional development benefits, which also have been shared. If the new utilities are used by other

businesses, and if the development is in a mutually agreed upon “sphere of influence” defined on a map, then taxes from these developments are also shared. After the deduction of the 30 percent hosting fee, the balance is split 75/25, with the higher amount going to the host town.

A similar formula was used when the towns decided to jointly build a major water project in 1981. Again, they used the concepts of a hosting fee and a sphere of influence, and a formula for distribution was jointly negotiated depending on the benefits to each city. They have used the same concepts on other projects, and have been involved in negotiations to expand the types of projects on which they share investment costs and the resulting increases in tax receipts.

2. The municipalities could develop a regional “Main Street” project that involves a cooperative approach to downtown development.

As noted, Ansonia, Derby, and Shelton are all actively involved in efforts to revitalize their downtowns. The Foundation has been a key funder of each of these initiatives. The activities to date have focused primarily on real estate-related activities -- assembling key parcels, redeveloping specific properties, and general beautification and infrastructure improvements. There has not been sufficient attention to retail and commercial market conditions. The major issue for commercial redevelopment is what type of activities can be supported by local and regional consumers? Moreover, is there sufficient scale of local and regional demand to support three “general” retail service environments in such close proximity?

The Foundation could provide seed funding for a preliminary effort to bring together those involved in downtown development activities in each of the Valley communities. As a first step, the group could jointly sponsor a market study that looks strategically at the retail potential in the region and seeks to identify potential niche markets for the downtowns. In addition, the effort could look at ways to ensure linkages and cooperation amongst the downtown developments. Finally, funding could be used to identify best practices in downtown development in similar communities.

The Valley Chamber has expressed some interest in this concept and has thought about pursuing a regional application for a Main Streets grant. Seed funding by the Foundation could lead to leveraging of other federal, state, and philanthropic support that could help each of the Valley downtown commercial districts regain their economic vitality.

3. The Valley communities can experiment with increased cooperation in the area of education -- creating a Valley School Foundation or implementing Derby’s concept of a region magnet art school.

Healthy Valley 2000 has recently established a mini grant program for teachers and administrators in the Valley public schools. These small grants are designed to allow teachers and administrators to implement innovative projects that are otherwise difficult to fund. Many other communities around the country have established School Foundations to serve this purpose. The Valley communities can come together and formalize this Healthy Valley Initiative through establishing a Valley School Foundation.

Strategy: Retain and Create New Jobs in the Valley by Assisting Existing Valley Companies and Residents with Entrepreneurial Interests

Strategic Initiative #1: Initiate a Business Calling Program to assist in the retention and expansion of existing companies.

Developing a more structured and institutionalized business retention program that is targeted to keeping existing companies competitive and economically viable could have a powerful impact on strengthening what is now a very vulnerable economic base in the region. If economic development resources are limited, which they appear to be, then targeting those resources on existing firms should be a priority rather than attracting new companies.

Calling programs have become a very useful mechanism for helping to retain existing businesses within a community. When strategically focused and properly carried out, the programs can have a significant impact. The programs can identify pressing and immediate problems that a particular business may face, identify trends that may be impacting a number of businesses, and become an important means of building an intimate relationship with businesses within a region. The relationships that are built through the process can build trust and a flow of information between businesses, regional economic development organizations, and government officials, enabling them to anticipate problems before they arise.

The data and information obtained from the program can serve as a baseline of information on a region's economy and as a mechanism for evaluating economic development in the region. The information can also help a region track a number of key indicators that highlight structural strengths and weaknesses. In effect, the benefits of calling programs are significant.

There are number of elements and steps that need to be taken in order to develop an effective program in the Valley.

First, a Working Group should be formed to oversee and direct the calling program. The Group should consist of people who know the region and the business community well. Included could be: a representative from the chamber, a realtor, a banker, an engineer, a state economic development official, a county supervisor, and someone from education and training.

Second, an interview protocol should be developed. The interview protocol will help focus the interviews that will occur in the calling program. A good protocol covers important information about the company, its future plans, and problems that it has around infrastructure, finance, workforce, capital, energy costs, etc. A good protocol is also modest in length and not so cumbersome and exhaustive that it acts as a disincentive for businesses that are being interviewed.

Third, teams of two people should be recruited to conduct the visitations. Members of the Working Group should certainly be included among the teams, but other volunteers from the region could be added. Volunteers should be high level people in the public and private sectors in the region and people with some knowledge of the region and its economy. All volunteers should receive a brief training session on the purpose of the program and the intended outcomes.

Fourth, because the number of businesses in the region is so large, the group should identify visitation targets. That is, the group should limit the number of firms that will be interviewed so that the process is manageable. Scores of businesses rather than hundreds are more likely to be visited. Companies should fit into a few different categories:

- major manufacturing sectors should be a priority because they offer the majority of good-paying jobs in the county and these are the firms that generate wealth;
- technology companies and companies in key service sectors are also good candidates because of the quality of jobs offered and these companies are beginning to have a strong presence in the regional economy;
- large employers like the hospital; and
- other companies that offer high-wage, high-skilled jobs.

Fifth, a short press release announcing the visitations would help give the effort visibility. Also, some communities have sent personal letters to CEOs before the visit, followed up with a telephone call to schedule the visit. The interviews with a company should take approximately 45 minutes and be held with CEOs or high level managers.

Finally, the results of all interviews should be entered into a database. The database will need to be maintained and analyzed for trends and key themes. The trends and themes should be communicated to all Working Group members, other resource organizations in the region, and within state government, where appropriate. This communication step is critical to the overall effectiveness of the calling program.

Some of the needs, problems, and opportunities identified will require immediate attention and should be acted upon in a timely fashion. Other issues will require action at a later date, but they should not be ignored. In either case, timeliness and professionalism will be critical to the integrity of the calling program. It is important to set the right tone and communicate to the business community that the calling program is effectively managed.

Strategic Initiative #2: Advocate for the establishment of a one-stop business assistance center at the Valley Chamber of Commerce.

As described in the findings section of this report, the Valley is short of accessible, small business assistance programs when compared to most other regions in the state. While the chamber provides limited small business assistance services, these services must be brought to a much larger scale and made easily accessible to the Valley's entrepreneurs and small business owners. The elements of a "one-stop" assistance program should include the following:

- a single point of contact for all information about small business assistance. This could include both a physical location with a staff person and a web site for on-line information;
- a small business counselor to provide general assistance such as help with business plans, basic management issues, and access to financing. This service could potentially be obtained by requesting that the regional Small Business Development Centers offer office hours at the Valley Chamber;
- organizing networking opportunities for local businesses;
- referral to provide business assistance professionals, such as accountants and attorneys, willing to provide some number of hours at subsidized rates; and
- brokering of services to other regional and state small business technical and management assistance and finance programs.

Strategy: Create New Affordable Housing Opportunities

Strategic Initiative #1: Support the formation of a regional nonprofit housing developer in the Valley.

While the Ansonia Housing Authority, through its Main Street Development Corporation, has been active in developing affordable rental housing in that town and another nonprofit is developing senior housing in Shelton, there is no organization looking at the overall housing needs in the Valley and no development organization focused on the Valley. Valley residents need a range of affordable housing options from shelters and transitional housing for very low-income and homeless adults, to housing with services for elders and people with special needs, affordable rental housing for working poor who do not qualify for Section 8 assistance, and more affordable homeownership options for the working poor.

A regional affordable housing development corporation that focused on the Valley could collaborate or joint venture with other entities to provide for these needs. A regional housing developer could work with banks to design creative financing and mortgage products for affordable housing. It could also partner with other groups like the Birmingham Group and the Corporation for Supportive Housing to offer housing with services for special needs populations. A Valley-based organization could also partner with other nonprofit housing developers or CDCs from New Haven or Bridgeport to share skills and development expertise. This could help foster greater regional cooperation. A regional nonprofit housing developer in the Valley should be structured as a Community Housing Development Organization (CHDO) to qualify for federal housing funds.

To avoid the need to build capacity for housing development from scratch, it would be more efficient for an existing organization to create a nonprofit subsidiary for affordable housing development. For example, TEAM might create a housing subsidiary to serve the Valley that could joint venture with other nonprofit developers. There are many successful examples of Community Action Agencies operating housing development subsidiaries. Another option might be for the Ansonia Housing Authority's subsidiary to become a Valley-wide entity that could take on affordable housing development and services in all six Valley towns.

