

Evaluation of the ChiWest ResourceNet Project

**A Demonstration Grant Funded by the Administration for Children and Families and the
Chicago Community Trust**

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Executive Summary

The ChiWest ResourceNet (CWRN) Project, generously funded by the Administration for Children and Families and the Chicago Community Trust, implemented a multi-component capacity building program for organizations serving low-income individuals in 7 communities on Chicago's west side. CWRN provided capacity building to 40 community- and faith-based organizations through 12 workshops, one-on-one technical assistance (TA), and provided financial assistance to 19 organizations participating in the TA component of the program. Evaluation findings from the CWRN Project show organizations utilized knowledge gained from workshops and TA as well as financial awards to impact the areas of leadership development, organization development and program development through completion of capacity building activities. Promising results in the areas of revenue development and community engagement show future impact on organizations in regards to an increase in funding and partnerships. The CWRN Project made the most impact on organizations receiving a combination of TA and financial assistance as evidenced in the high number of capacity building activities completed by this group. Overall, evaluation findings exemplify that the components of the CWRN program: high-quality workshops, one-on-one TA provided by experienced professionals, and financial assistance targeting specific activities served to improve the effectiveness of organizations to provide services to the most in need on Chicago's west side.

Overview of the CWRN Project and Evaluation Design

The University of Illinois at Chicago Neighborhoods Initiative (UICNI) ChiWest ResourceNet (CWRN) Project assisted faith-based (FBOs) and community-based organizations (CBOs) with capacity building by providing technical assistance, training workshops, and financial assistance for organizations serving communities surrounding the University (Pilsen, Little Village, North Lawndale, East Garfield, West Garfield, Humboldt Park, and Near West.) Over seventy (73) FBOs and CBOs attended CWRN training workshops. Through a rigorous RFP process CWRN selected 40 organizations to receive technical assistance (TA) awards consisting of up to 16 hours of one-on-one TA from an expert TA Advisor. TA Advisors, with organization leadership, conducted initial needs assessments and developed Customized Capacity Building Plans, which focused activities in at least two critical areas: 1) leadership development, 2) organizational development, 3) program development, and/or 4) community engagement, based on the organizations' specific needs. Organizations that received TA awards competed for financial assistance to further assist a specific capacity building activity. Nineteen (19) of the 40 CWRN organizations received financial assistance awards ranging from \$4,500 to \$19,550.

The CWRN Project goals and objectives written in the Chicago Community Trust and Administration for Children and Families proposals were:

1. Improve knowledge and skills in the effective operation of 60 social service organizations;
2. Implement management and organizational improvements in at least 20 organizations;
3. Expand and diversify funding sources in at least 15 organizations;
4. Expand and enhance social services provided by at least 15 organizations;
5. Build the leadership capacity of board members, staff, and volunteers of at least 20 FBOs and CBOs.
6. Improve the ability of 20 FBOs and CBOs to engage the community and more effectively reach their client base, assess community needs, organize residents, and/or collaborate with other institutions;
7. Make 25-30 sub-awards that help the recipients meet a critical capacity building need.

8. Overall, 20% increase in the number of FBOs and CBOs reporting an increase in number of people served as a result of capacity building activities.

The CWRN evaluation was designed to provide formative information used to continuously refine program methods and summative data used to recommend best practices. A multi-method approach was taken to evaluate the program on three levels: 1) a macro-system level evaluation of the effectiveness of the management, outreach, and engagement strategies; 2) a participant organization level evaluation of program impact; and 3) an individual level assessment of program impact on performance in areas reflecting the application of new skills. The evaluation was designed to document outcomes and performance in the following areas:

- Assessment of organizational needs and assets
- Achievement of individualized training and TA objectives
- Efficacy of the training and TA strategies employed to achieve objectives
- Accuracy of indicators used to assess progress toward benchmarks for each program element
- Effectiveness of program monitoring and measurement tools used to track outcomes.

Six overarching evaluation questions were developed to focus and guide evaluation efforts. These questions were:

1. What are the training needs for the organizations?
2. What are the capacity building needs for the organizations?
3. How do organizations perceive the effectiveness/usefulness of the training they receive and how have they applied what they learned?
4. How do organizations perceive the effectiveness of the TA they received?
5. Has technical assistance received resulted in capacity building for organizations?
6. Have sub-award funds received by organizations resulted in enhanced capacity building?

Five (5) tools measured CWRN program implementation and participant organization capacity building outcomes. The Organization Assessment and Customized Capacity Building Plan served as the assessment tools tracking areas of improvement on the four critical areas of capacity building. The training workshop evaluation measured the extent to which learning objectives were realized and understood by participants. To measure how organizations perceive the CWRN Project overall, one-on-one TA, and financial assistance as useful and effective in improving two or more of the four areas of capacity building, a Participant Satisfaction Survey was given to organizations six-months into program implementation. A Progress Report was given to all CWRN organizations, which tracked progress on capacity building activities and how the activities impacted organizations mid-way through the project timeline and a month after the project ended. Taken together, the data from these assessments were used to identify capacity-building activities implemented within organizations participating in CWRN and whether these activities achieve measurable results.

Evaluation Methods

The CWRN Project was designed to utilize local expertise and community resources. CWRN Project training workshops were held at meeting spaces on the UIC campus or at community organization spaces within the neighborhoods surrounding the university campus. Program staff was positioned at one of two UIC departmental sites: the Great Cities Institute or Institute for Health Research and Policy through the duration of the project. TA Advisors were chosen based on their expertise and experience with organizations in the program's focused neighborhoods. Advisors scheduled periodic meetings to guide capacity building activity progress with organization leadership at each organization's location.

Project demographics exemplify CWRN's commitment to increase the capacity of organizations surrounding the UIC campus that improve living conditions and increase access to income and other resources for low-income people. Sixty-seven percent (67%) of CWRN participating organizations identified as community-based organizations, while 33% identified as faith-based. CWRN organizations were located in one of 7 neighborhoods surrounding the UIC Campus, with the most organizations (25%) located in the North Lawndale neighborhood. Per ACF guidelines, organizations were asked to identify their area of focus from a set list of options. The largest number of organizations (40%) identified their area of focus as At-Risk Youth. Nearly 60% of organizations participating in the CWRN program (58%) have annual budgets at or below \$500,000. Nineteen organizations receiving TA from CWRN also received a financial award to be applied to capacity building activities. Capacity building activities that received the most funding were for those that fell under the organizational development category (42%.) Most CWRN organizations were awarded funds within the \$12,001-\$18,000 range (32%.) Figure 1 shows the demographic breakdown of CWRN participants.

Figure 1: CWRN Demographics Table

Variables	CWRN Participants (n=40)		
	Categories	#	%
Organization Type	Community Organization	27	67
	Faith-based Organization	13	33
Neighborhood Service Area	East Garfield Park	4	10
	Humboldt Park	9	23
	Little Village	5	13
	Near West	2	5
	North Lawndale	10	25
	Pilsen	4	10
	West Garfield Park	5	13
Priority Areas	All Categories	3	7
	At Risk Youth	16	40
	At Risk Youth + Other Services	8	20
	Elders in Need	1	3
	Employment Services	4	10
	Homelessness	7	17
	Reentry/Homelessness	1	3
Annual Budget	<\$100,000	7	18
	\$101,000-500,000	16	40
	\$501,000-900,000	6	15
	>901,000	11	27
Subaward	Organizations Receiving Funds	19	48
	Organizations Not Receiving Funds	21	52
CBA in which Funds Granted	Leadership Development	3	16
	Organizational Development	8	42
	Program Development	4	21
	Community Engagement	4	21
Financial Assistance Amount Awarded	\$4,500-8,000	5	26
	\$8,001-12,000	4	21
	\$12,001-18,000	6	32
	\$18,001-19,950	4	21

Formative evaluation on the CWRN Project began in February 2010. In order to determine best fit for training workshop topics to the organizations applying for CWRN TA, a training workshop topic survey was distributed to all organizations attending the CWRN Bidders Conference. Using the data from this survey, CWRN worked with the Donor's Forum to develop and schedule training workshops over the course of the project. A Training Workshop Evaluation was distributed to all workshop participants at the end of each workshop. Data collection for the workshop evaluations was on-going throughout the project. Training evaluation data summaries were compiled and shared with CWRN project staff and the Donor's Forum after each workshop.

In March 2010, organizations chosen to participate in the CWRN Project were asked to complete the Organization Assessment and work with their assigned TA Advisor in developing a customized Capacity Building Plan at the first site visit. These plans capture capacity building activities, expected outcomes, and outcome indicators defined by the organization's leadership with assistance by the TA Advisor. The Capacity Building Plans were used as a 'roadmap' to guide organizations through the process of completing capacity building activities. Mid-way through the project, participating organizations were asked to assess their level of satisfaction with the CWRN Project as a whole and the one-on-one technical assistance (TA) process. The Participant Satisfaction Survey was collected in July 2010 and was designed to inform project staff on feedback from participating organizations' leadership. These data, in turn, were used to inform program implementation for the duration of the project.

Summative evaluation activities include the CWRN Progress Report. This assessment captured both qualitative and quantitative data on capacity building activities completed, but also focused questions on how organizations stay afloat in a tough economy. The CWRN Progress Report was collected in August and November 2010. In addition to the summative evaluation self-assessment, two focus groups were conducted: one with organizations attending the CWRN Roundtable Event in October 2010 and the

other with CWRN project staff in December 2010. Both focus groups served to round out the summative evaluation findings by articulating best practices and lessons learned from two distinct audiences. By using several methods of data collection: participant evaluations, self-assessments and focus groups, the CWRN Project strived to provide a rich story of capacity building impact and sustainability for organizations serving those most in need on Chicago's west side.

Results

The Results section of this report is divided between formative and summative evaluation findings and then further organized by evaluation tool. A summary of CWRN evaluation findings is located in the Discussion section at the end of this report.

Formative Evaluation Findings

CWRN Organization Assessment

CWRN participants were required to participate in an assessment of their capacity building needs, develop a detailed capacity building plan, attend workshops, and receive one-on-one TA from an assigned TA Advisor. The Organization Assessment was completed by organization leadership via Survey Monkey and was developed from an assessment created by the University of Kansas with customizations to CWRN program components. The assessment was a three-part process. First, the organization's leadership self-assessed strengths and weaknesses within the four critical areas defined by the grant. Second, the evaluator provided a summary of the assessment results in a narrative format for each of the organizations, as well as the assigned TA Advisor to review. Thirdly, each organization hosted a site visit for the TA Advisor to go through the assessment in detail as well as to further assess the organization's capacity. The TA Advisor then assisted the organization in development of a detailed Capacity Building Plan. This plan defined capacity building activities based on the organization's needs. Training workshop suggestions and activities that could be funded by a sub-award were customized to the organization and also documented in the capacity building plans.

Aggregate results of the Organization Assessment reveal that organizations reported the most strengths in the Organizational Development Area, while only one area, Community Engagement, showed organizations reporting more needs than strengths. Figures 2-5 below illustrate the strengths

and needs organized by the critical area reported by CWRN organizations at the beginning of the program.

Figure 2: CWRN Organization Assessment Results – Organizational Development (n=40)

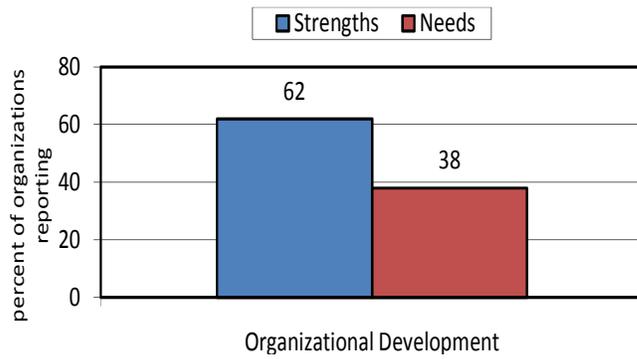


Figure 3: CWRN Organization Assessment Results – Leadership Development (n=40)

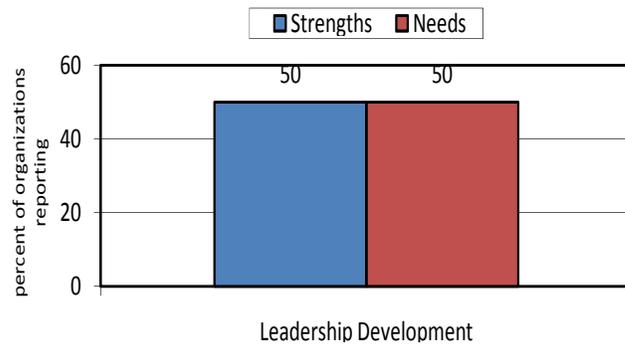


Figure 4: CWRN Organization Assessment Results – Program Development (n=40)

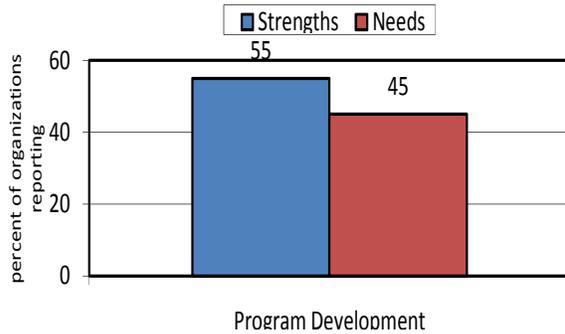
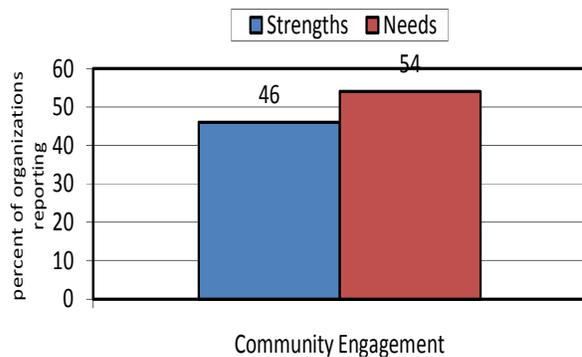


Figure 5: CWRN Organization Assessment Results – Community Engagement (n=40)



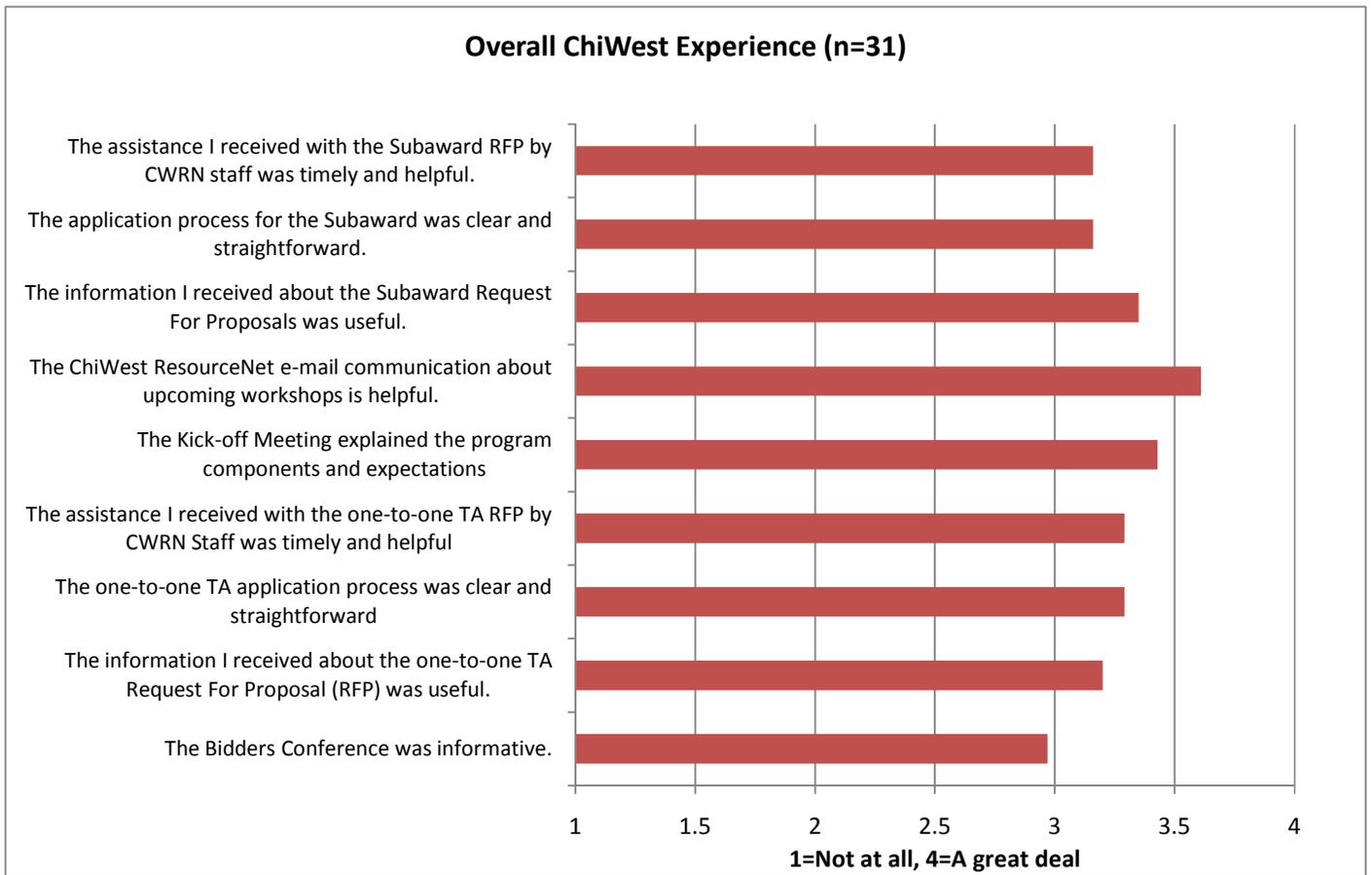
TA Advisors and organization leadership agreed that the Organization Assessment data helped to guide initial discussions on capacity building. And while an initial comparison of the Organization Assessment data and Capacity Building Plans showed that the two assessments aligned, discussion with organizational staff in a focus group at the end of the program revealed limitations to the Organization Assessment results in determining areas of capacity building focus. Please see page 23 for a summary of a focus group discussion with participating organizations.

CWRN Participant Satisfaction Survey

In order to answer the question: How do organizations perceive the effectiveness of the program overall and the TA they received, CWRN participants were asked to complete a satisfaction survey in August 2010. Thirty-one (31) out of 40 organizations completed the survey, a 78% return rate.

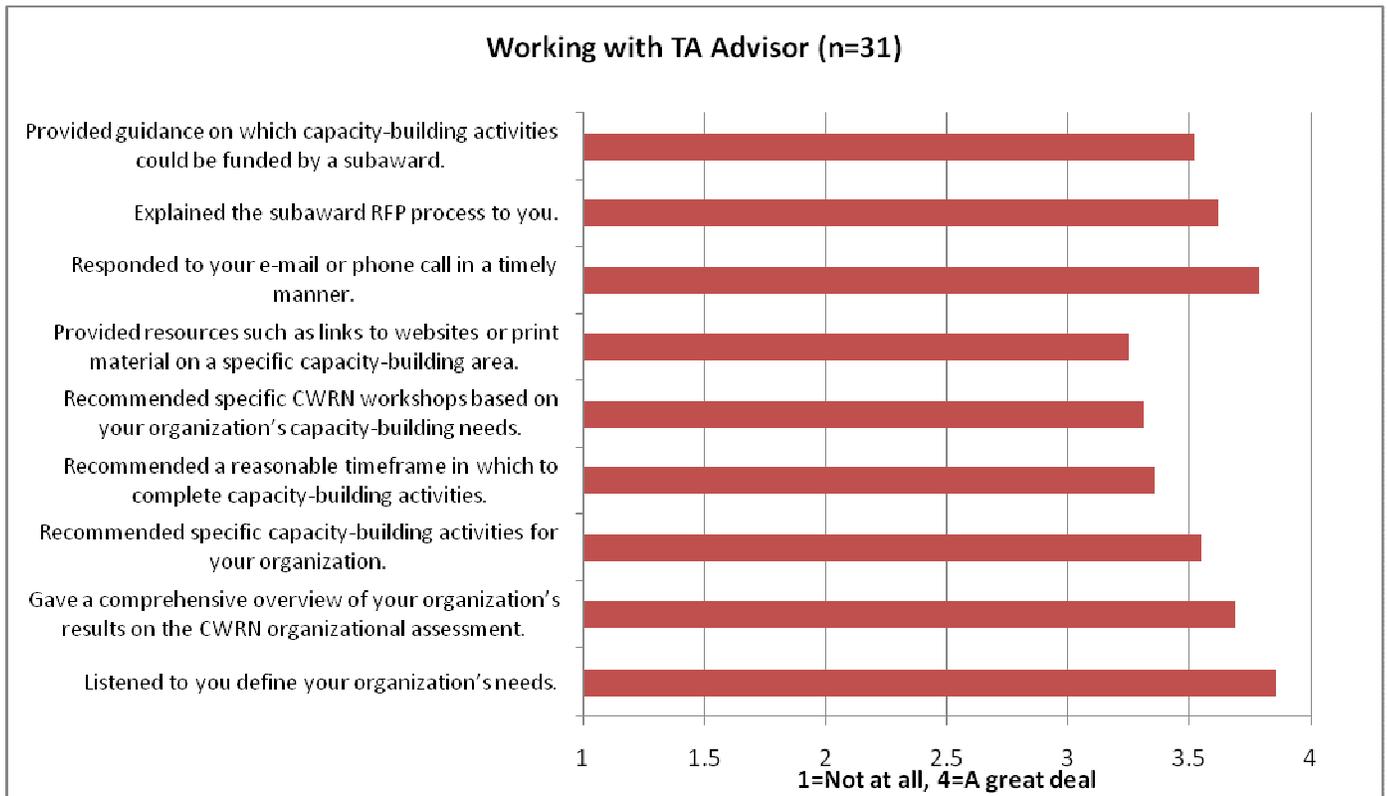
Organization leadership were asked to rate specific program components and aspects of TA on a four-point scale with 4 being “A great deal” and 1 being “Not at all.” The average overall rating for program components was 3.30. The highest rated program component was “The ChiWest ResourceNet e-mail communication about upcoming workshops is helpful” (3.61), while participants rated “The Bidders Conference was informative” the lowest (2.97.) When asked to rate their experience with CWRN overall, 81% of respondents chose “Excellent” or “Above Average” and 94% of respondents reported that they would “Very Likely” or “Likely” refer a colleague to CWRN.

Figure 6: CWRN Participant Satisfaction Survey Overall Program Component Ratings



Technical Assistance components to the CWRN program received an overall average rating of 3.34. The highest rated TA component was “Listened to you define your organization’s needs” (3.87), while the lowest rated component was “Provided resources such as links to websites or print material on a specific capacity-building area” (3.25.) Eight-seven percent (87%) of respondents rated their last face-to-face meeting with their TA Advisor as “Excellent” or “Above Average.”

Figure 7: CWRN Participant Satisfaction Survey TA Component Ratings



Participating organizations valued their experience with the CWRN Project as a whole and the TA component in particular as evidenced in the findings stated above. Several surveys that had low ratings were followed up either by program staff or the organization’s assigned TA Advisor to address the feedback personally. Organizations’ overwhelming criticism of the program was that the timeline for completing capacity building activities and spending sub-award funds was too short. While extending the timeline for the program was not an option for CWRN due to grant restrictions, this feedback was

taken into consideration for future projects. For more information on lessons learned and best practices, please see the Focus Group section on page 23.

Summative Evaluation Findings

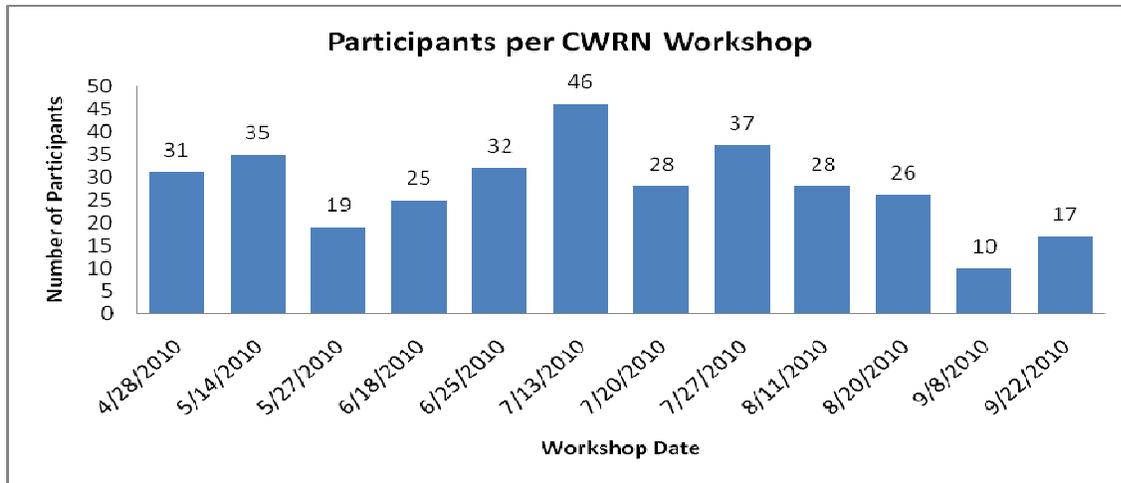
CWRN Training Workshops

CWRN collaborated with the Donor’s Forum to provide a series of twelve training workshops offered to organizations city-wide. Priority registration for these workshops was given to CWRN participants. CWRN also held two roundtable events for participants only. Each organization receiving TA from CWRN was required to attend the recommended workshops described in their Capacity Building Plans. Organizations also had the option to participate in all workshops offered. The workshops directly correlated with the ACF Four Critical Areas: 1.) Leadership Development, 2.) Organization Development, 3.) Program Development, 4.) Community Engagement. There were approximately two-to-three workshops in each of the four critical areas.

Since CWRN was utilizing Donor’s Forum facilitators to lead workshops, the Donor’s Forum workshop evaluation form, modified slightly to include specific CWRN questions, was used for all CWRN workshops. The workshop evaluation form asked participants to rate key components of the workshops on a five-point scale, with 5 being “Strongly Agree” and 1 being “Strongly Disagree.” The evaluation form also asked participants to rate the workshop overall. Paper copies of the evaluation forms were handed out to all participants at each workshop. The CWRN Project Manager collected the completed forms, gave them to the evaluator, who then entered them into Survey Monkey. This method for distributing the evaluation form was used to maximize the return rate on the completed evaluations. A 90% average return rate on workshop evaluations was achieved. A summary report of workshop evaluation data was generated for each workshop and shared with CWRN staff and the Donor’s Forum.

CWRN workshops were well attended by program participants and non-participants alike. On average 76% of workshop attendees were CWRN participants, while 24% were not. Thirty-two (32) out of the 40 organizations participating in the TA component of CWRN attended at least one workshop. Approximately 41 additional organizations from across the city attended CWRN workshops for a total of 73 organizations in attendance, thereby exceeding the goal to improve knowledge and skills in the effective operation of 60 social service organizations. The average number of workshops attended by CWRN participants was 6 with a range of 1 to 12. Seventeen (17) CWRN organizations attended 6 or more workshops. The most popular workshop topics focused on fundraising, grant seeking and strategic planning. The workshop title with the most participants was “Diversifying Funding Sources”, while the least attended workshop was “How to Improve Board/CEO Relationships.” The graph below (Figure 8) illustrates the number of participants for each CWRN workshop organized by date.

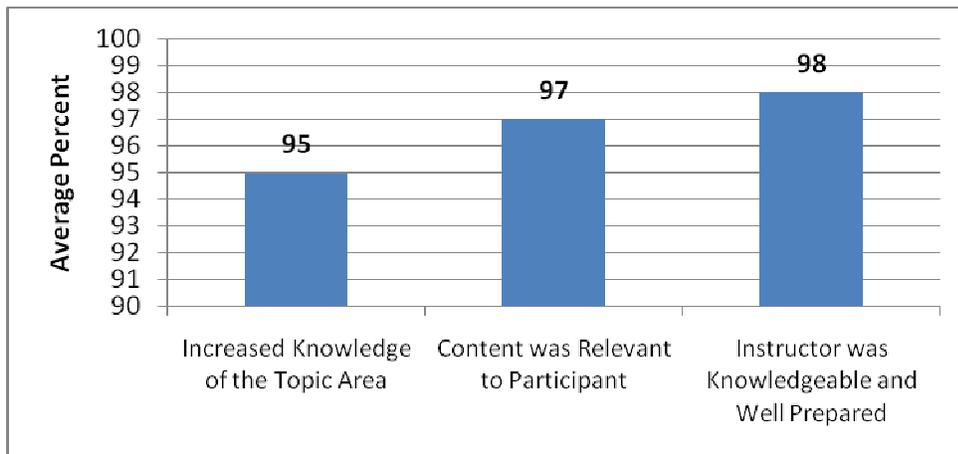
Figure 8: CWRN Workshop Attendance



The CWRN workshops were well received as evidenced by workshop evaluations. Ninety percent (90%) of workshop participants on average rated the workshop overall as “Excellent” or “Above Average,” with a range of 80% to 97%. Workshop participants rated key components of the workshops

as “Strongly Agree” or “Agree” at a high rate as well. Ninety-five percent (95%) of participants on average reported that they strongly agreed or agreed that they increased their knowledge of the topic area. Ninety-seven percent (97%) of participants on average strongly agreed or agreed that the content or subject matter of the workshop was relevant to them or their agency. Ninety-eight percent (98%) of participants on average strongly agreed or agreed that the instructor of the workshop was knowledgeable and well prepared. Figure 9 below illustrates the average percent of respondents rating key components of CWRN workshops as “Strongly Agreed” or “Agreed.”

Figure 9: Aggregate of Strongly Agreed or Agreed Ratings on Key Components of CWRN Workshops



CWRN, based on the evaluation findings stated above, provided high quality, well-received workshops for FBOs and CBOs city-wide. CWRN participating organizations took advantage of the workshop series to inform capacity building activities especially regarding Leadership Development and Revenue Development. Six (6) participating organizations specifically mentioned that they used what they learned from CWRN workshops to guide activities, while many organizations used the workshops for professional development for staff and time to network with other organizations. Impact of these workshops is evident in comments written by CWRN organizations in the Final Progress Report, which is reported on in more detail in the section below.

CWRN Progress Report

In order to measure CWRN goals specific to capacity building, organizations receiving TA and financial assistance were asked to complete an interim and final progress report. This report was designed for organizations to describe progress on capacity building activities completed in each of the four critical areas, ways in which the activities impact an organization, and ways in which sub-award funding impacted an organization. The report also asked questions pertaining to how these organizations maintain operations in a tough economy. When reporting on capacity building activities, organizations chose from a list of acceptable activities developed by ACF. The ACF list provided uniformity across organizations when reporting on activities and aided in analysis of these data.

Data from the Progress Reports (n= 36, a 90% return rate) show that CWRN organizations were actively engaged in the capacity building process and demonstrated they were maintaining operations despite a tough economic climate for non-profits. The majority of organizations (53%) reported no change or an increase to their budgets. Fifty percent (50%) of organizations hired new staff and 75% hired new volunteers. The most reported activities focused on increasing an organization's infrastructures (i.e., board development, strategic planning, creating a fundraising plan, and executive coaching activities.) Eight (8) goal statements focused on outcome measures from capacity building activities. CWRN achieved six out of the 8 goals. The goal statements and corresponding outcomes are as follows:

Outcomes Met

Goal Statement: Improve knowledge and skills in the effective operation of 60 social service organizations

Outcome: 73 organizations improved their knowledge and skills in the effective operation of social services. (See the CWRN Workshops section on page 15 for more details on this outcome.)

Goal Statement: Make 25-30 sub-awards that help the recipients meet a critical capacity building need.

Outcome: 19 sub-awards were awarded to organizations which resulted in meeting a critical capacity building need. (See the Sub-award Process section on page 21 for more detail on this outcome.)

Goal Statement: Build the leadership capacity of board members, staff, and volunteers of at least 20 FBOs and CBOs.

Outcome: 24 out of 36 FBOs and CBOs reported completing a total of 58 leadership capacity building activities. The top 3 leadership capacity building activities were: Recruit Board Members (n=11), Engage in Executive Coaching Activities (n=11), and Provide Training/Written Information for Board of Directors (n=10.)

Goal Statement: Implement management and organizational improvements in at least 20 FBOs and CBOs.

Outcome: 27 out of 36 FBOs and CBOs reported completing a total of 63 organizational capacity building activities, with the top 3 organizational activities being Creating a Strategic Plan (n=10), Identifying Potential Funding Sources (n=10), and Create a Revenue Development Plan (n=9.)

Goal Statement: Expand and enhance social services provided by at least 15 FBOs and CBOs.

Outcome: 23 out of 36 FBOs and CBOs reported completing a total of 58 program development capacity building activities, with the top 3 program activities being: Taken Steps to Increase the Number of Clients Served in Existing Geographic Area (n=8), Taken Steps to Increase the Effectiveness of Existing Services (n=7), and Taken Steps to Reach an Underserved Population in Existing Geographic Area (n=7).

Goal Statement: Overall, 20% increase in number of FBOs and CBOs reporting an increase in the number of people served as a result of capacity building activities.

Outcome: 11 out of 30 FBOs and CBOs (37%) reported an increase in the number of people served as a result of capacity building activities. Six organizations did not complete this portion of the report.

Outcomes Not Met

Goal Statement: Expand and diversify funding sources in at least 15 FBOs and CBOs. Expansion and diversification of funding sources were required to be derived from capacity building activities completed by organizations. Therefore, financial assistance from CWRN was not included in this measure.

Outcome: 6 out of 36 FBOs and CBOs reported expanding and diversifying their funding sources, while an additional 6 FBOs and CBOs reported completing activities that would allow for future expansion and diversification of funding sources through grant writing, grant proposals submitted, board commitments to giving, or creating a fundraising plan.

Goal Statement: Improve the ability of 20 FBOs and CBOs to engage the community and more effectively reach their client base, assess community needs, organize residents and/or collaborate with other institutions.

Outcome: 17 out of 36 FBOs and CBOs reported completing a total of 41 community engagement capacity building activities, with the top 3 community activities being: Create or Update a Brochure (n=7), Create or Update a Website (n=7), and Create a Map/Inventory of Community Assets (n=5.)

Speculation as to why two goals, expanding and diversifying funding sources and community engagement, were not met is outlined in the Discussion section at the end of this report. A glimpse into what organizations saw as priority and what was defined as impactful to an organization is evidenced in the open ended questions from the Final Progress Report. When asked to describe impact of capacity building activities on the organizations, respondents identified areas of impact that echoed the most reported capacity building activities mentioned above.

“We are a brand new organization that has benefited immensely from everything ChiWest has done for us. From the website and brochure, to grant-writing classes, to developing a strategic plan for implementing our mission, this has been most valuable. I have also learned of similar organizations in the Lawndale area that I am developing partnerships with on various levels as a result of our capacity building grant and the network it’s created.”

“My board has been much more effective since the start of this program and I have been able to much better track the assessments of my board's improvements to the business itself.”

“Our consultant has given us great ideas on how to identify funding sources, specifically some ideas that our organization was not aware of. Our meetings with her have created momentum for our plans to locate and apply for various grants.”

“We received much needed assistance in starting a brand new organization, addressing important decisions early on, and learning how to write grants. The staff was friendly

and competent and a delight to work with. All around very good experience for our organization.”

“I'd say that through our experience with CWRN, our organization has grown leaps as it relates to strategic planning and fundraising plans that will have an impact in our future.”

Challenges or barriers to completing capacity building activities revolved around time, staff involvement, and board support. Respondents summed up the challenges of participation in the CWRN Project with these statements:

“As executive director, it was difficult to allot time not only towards developing a capacity building activity, but implementing it. The irony is that a smaller size agency is in greatest need of a capacity building support and yet they have the littlest amount of time to put towards capacity building because so much is going on at once.”

“Fast paced; an organization needs to have its working points together and in order for the project to work best. Perhaps a preparation session to be sure that working points are together and in order would be helpful.”

Organizations that received one-on-one TA were successful in completing capacity building activities that impacted their organizations as the data from the Progress Reports show. To find out whether or not receiving financial assistance coupled with one-on-one TA enhanced capacity building activities, a comparison of funded and non-funded organizations' data from the Progress Report was done.

Sub-award Process

Nineteen (19) organizations received sub-awards funding capacity building activities in one of the four critical areas. The area in which the most sub-awards were funded was Organizational Development. In order to determine whether or not financial assistance had an added impact on organizations receiving one-on-on TA from CWRN, a comparison analysis on the number of capacity building activities completed reported in the Final Progress Report by funded (n=19) and non-funded (n=17) organizations was conducted. Findings show a higher rate in the overall number of capacity

building activities completed by funded organizations and a distinct increase in the capacity building activities completed in the areas of Program Development and Community Engagement. The table below shows the capacity building activities completed by funded and non-funded organizations.

Figure 10: Comparison of Capacity Building Activities Completed by Funded and Non-Funded Organizations.

	Total Number of CBAs per Group		Average Number of CBAs per Group		Percent Difference
	Funded	Non-Funded	Funded	Non-Funded	
Leadership Development	34	24	1.79	1.60	12%
Organizational Development	43	20	2.26	1.33	70%
Program Development	48	10	2.53	0.67	278%
Community Engagement	33	8	1.74	0.53	228%

In order to gain insight into the dramatic differences between funded and non-funded organizations capacity building activities in the Program Development and Community Engagement areas, analysis of Final Progress Report open ended questions regarding the sub-award process was done as well as archival document analysis of sub-award proposals. This analysis revealed that 17 organizations hired consultants to work on either training (i.e., board training, strategic plan training) or implementing products (i.e., creation of marketing materials, website development, creation of an evaluation system.) 10 organizations also purchased equipment such as software, servers, computers or in one case a tractor and trailer for CDL training. Funded organizations expressed that with the addition of the sub-award funds, they were able to complete capacity building activities that were needed, but would not have been completed had they not had the funding. Having the additional funds to devote to capacity building allowed organizations to work with their TA Advisor on capacity building activities in another area of need, thereby completing more capacity building activities overall.

CWRN Focus Groups

After program implementation was completed, two focus groups: one with participant organization staff and one with the CWRN program staff were conducted in order to define lessons learned and best practices of the CWRN Project. The first focus group with participant organizations was conducted at the Roundtable Event held in October 2010. A presentation of evaluation findings was given at this event. The focus group followed to engage organization staff in a discussion about their experience with the TA component of the program specifically around the following questions: 1.) “How did you decide what activities took priority when you and your TA Advisor created the Capacity Building Plan?” and 2.) “What were your expectations for technical assistance?”

Participants revealed several unique aspects to the TA Advisor role and how those aspects impacted their organization. First, many of the participants spoke of how the Organization Assessment was not as helpful as their initial discussions with a TA Advisor in defining areas of capacity building. The discussion between the TA Advisor and organization leadership changed the original direction of where the executive director wanted to go with capacity building. Participants also valued the “outsider” status of the TA Advisors. Having someone from the outside look at the organization’s programs and structure helped to uncover preconceived notions and deficiencies and helped to focus capacity building efforts. Overall, participant’s felt the TA exceeded their initial expectations and did not expect their TA Advisor to be as “hands on” and impact the organization as much as she did. Some participants spoke to the versatility of their TA Advisor describing how she shifted focus away from a capacity building activity once it was funded through a sub-award, recommended a consultant to help with that activity, and then focused on another capacity building area entirely. These comments were helpful in defining best practices of the TA component to the CWRN program.

In December 2010, CWRN program staff consisting of the Director, Assistant Director, Project Coordinator and Grant Manager participated in a focus group that was designed to define lessons learned and best practices of the CWRN Project. Lessons learned revolved around revision of the program design and repositioning staff geographically. Overwhelmingly, project staff agreed that the timeframe for program implementation should be longer. One staff member suggested a 2 year timeframe in which 3 months were devoted to project planning, 15 months devoted to program implementation, and 6 months devoted to capturing outcomes post-project. Several staff members expressed that the workshop format should be revised to focus around what is learned from the capacity building plan process and is therefore more customized to organizations' needs. More peer learning roundtables should have been incorporated in the workshop component. Staff also mentioned that the financial assistance RFP process should be revised to include more time for TA Advisors to meet with organizations in order to determine activities to be funded and help in the RFP process, streamline the RFP paperwork, and have organizations submit hard copies of the RFP. While the geographic position of program staff at IHRP helped with the University's process of the sub-awards, having staff geographically separated hindered communication between program staff and the directors.

Promising practices were defined as what worked in the CWRN Project and what could be replicated as a model for other organizations to implement. The combination of TA, workshops and financial assistance was identified as a success by program staff and is reflected in the project's evaluation findings. The success of the TA component, it was felt by several members, relied on TA Advisors being embedded in the communities CWRN served. The TA Advisors were familiar with the organizations they worked with and knew opportunities that existed within the communities. Since TA Advisors were paid from an outside source and not the organizations they worked with, the TA Advisors could stand behind their expertise and create an equal relationship between them and the organizations' leadership. While staff members felt the workshop format needed to be revised, they

recognized that the workshops were well received by organizations, and often times knowledge from the workshops were used for capacity building activities or networking at workshops resulted in partnerships for participants. Two other successes of the project that staff felt should be presented at the beginning of the program to organizations is the CWRN Resource Manual and a list of recommended consultants organized by areas of expertise.

Discussion

Findings from the evaluation of the CWRN Project suggest that workshops, technical assistance and financial assistance assisted organizations in completing capacity building activities. Evaluation findings corroborate that organizations identified these activities as having a positive impact on the day-to-day operations of the organization as well as having an impact on the organization in the future. It is important to note that these results were consistent across all organizations receiving TA that completed a Progress Report. The findings demonstrate CWRN fulfilled a need for high quality, multi-dimensional capacity building programs aimed at community- and faith-based organizations serving areas of Chicago that have been hit the hardest during the most recent economic recession. The findings also confirm the need for projects like CWRN to continue to provide these services and become mainstays in the 7 focused communities described in the Overview section of this report.

Several limitations to the evaluation of the CWRN Project were experienced, which revolved around the 9-month timeline for program implementation. Data collection on key evaluation tools that measured outcomes posed a challenge. Organizations placed a priority, rightly so, on completing capacity building activities and spending down sub-awards in a very short time span and therefore, were not as responsive to completing the interim and final Progress Reports. Another limitation and challenge was the short length of time given to collect post-project data. It is speculated that the un-met goals of the project might have been met had evaluation efforts continued to collect impact data from organizations 6- to 12-months post-project. An additional evaluation tool that measured pre and post outcomes was not included in this report due to the time needed to do an in-depth analysis. The findings from this tool will be included in the final project report for ACF and will be sent to the Chicago Community Trust upon completion. Lastly, the evaluation plan was paired down from the original version in order to successfully collect data from organizations within the timeline. The original evaluation plan proposed to measure levels of impact between and across the three components of the

program: workshops, TA, and financial assistance. This more complex level of measuring 'dosage' of the CWRN program would have helped to inform replication of the CWRN model and research on capacity building programs in general.