

How Community Development Education Can Build Capacity: The Case of the Urban Developers Program

Janet Smith and Rachel Weber
Urban Planning and Policy Program
University of Illinois at Chicago

Great Cities Institute
College of Urban Planning and Public Affairs
University of Illinois at Chicago





The Great Cities Institute

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Great Cities Institute (MC 107)
College of Urban Planning and Public Affairs
University of Illinois at Chicago
412 S. Peoria Street, Suite 400
Chicago IL 60607-7067
Phone: 312-996-8700
FAX: 312-996-8933

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University of Illinois at Chicago

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Abstract

The future of affordable housing in the US depends on the capacity of community development corporations (CDCs) to maintain the existing stock and to develop additional units. This article examines three different approaches to delivering community development education-- workshops and short courses, traditional professional education programs, and hybrid programs-- to enhance different forms of CDC capacity. Each embodies a different philosophy of acquiring conceptual and operational knowledge in the community development field. We present a case study of the Urban Developers Program, a certificate program offered jointly by the University of Illinois at Chicago and the Chicago Rehab Network, to illustrate how hybrid programs can enhance skills and competencies while providing an opportunity for practitioners to be reflective and to critically assess development-related tools and strategies.

Key words: community development education, experiential learning, capacity building, community development corporation (CDC), affordable housing

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INTRODUCTION

The contracting government role in affordable housing continues to push local community development corporations (CDCs) to do more with less. Recent research on the challenges facing CDCs points clearly to the need for training and technical assistance to help groups develop higher quality affordable housing more efficiently and to ensure that organizations are able to maintain the stock they develop (see Rohe, Bratt and Biswas 2003; Brehm 2002; Rubin 2000; Steinbach 1999; Zdenek 1999). While the role of consulting and training (in the form of workshops, on-line programs, and short courses) has expanded, more education is needed to build the capacity of these organizations, their staff, and boards (Rohe, Bratt and Biswas 2003). As Zdenek points out in his article, “The Eight Habits of Highly Effective CDCs”:

CDCs need to invest in building the capacity of their staffs through a formal human resource strategy. Large corporations invest in their people in a strategic way to develop their skills – and improve the company's bottom line. CDCs have become more focused in recent years on classic personnel issues – benefits and salaries, for example. But this isn't the same as initiating a formal program for developing people's performance, skills, growth, and leadership capabilities (1999:1).

A “human resource strategy” is necessary because the human capital embodied in volunteers, staff, and board members is critical to the successful operation of a CDC, where the challenging work typically involves long hours and low pay. As evidence of CDC failures attests (e.g., see Rohe, Bratt and Biswas 2003; Stoecker 1997, 2003), a strong commitment to the organization's mission is not enough to build and maintain affordable housing. In fact, dedication of this sort may be detrimental if an organization does not also have solid leadership and a good strategic

plan as its guide, and strong internal and project management to assure the CDC can sustain the affordable housing it has produced (Rohe and Bratt 2003).

Recent research by Servon and Glickman (2003) points out the benefits of expanded CDC capacity, particularly that which develops through partnerships with local intermediaries. Benefits include increased output in the form of number of housing units produced, but also the size and ability of staff, overall budget, and potential to raise funds and complete future projects. While this research is an important first step in developing a better understanding of the outcomes of capacity building, it tells us little about *how* this capacity is actually built.

Further, although capacity building concerns the functioning of individual organizations in the existing system of affordable housing development, the field as a whole will not improve its ability to create positive outcomes unless these organizations also learn to change the inherited system (Stoecker 1997; 2003). In other words, the failures, downsizings, and mergers of CDCs witnessed in the 1990s are not just the result of organizational weaknesses but of the external current funding climate and the stage of development the industry is in now (Vidal 1997). Capacity building efforts must take on issues of wider political reform in order to improve their chances of survival and success.

This article examines one approach to capacity building that aims to not only develop skills that can help individual CDCs but also advance the field of community development in general. The Urban Developers Program (UDP) is an educational program jointly administered by the University of Illinois at Chicago (UIC) and the Chicago Rehab Network (CRN), a non-profit, citywide membership organization whose mission is to promote and support affordable housing development without displacement. The program is a hybrid of the short workshops typically found in the

community development field and a traditional academic degree program. Underlying the design of hybrid programs is a belief in the value of “experiential learning”. Experiential learning can take place when classroom and the community, conceptual and operational understandings, are treated as complimentary components so that practical experiences are connected to larger body of general knowledge (e.g., see Krumholz and Keating 1999). The UDP curriculum focuses on guiding all participants through the affordable housing development process from start to finish. While CDC staff come to the UDP to gain knowledge that can help them with a specific development project (usually in progress or in the pipeline), the program is also designed to expose them to a range of strategies to produce more affordable housing and to situate their work in the broader context and history of community development in the US.

The aim of this research is twofold: to review the progress of the Urban Developers Program, which at the time of the study was in its fourth year at UIC, and to better understand the benefits and disadvantages of a hybrid approach to delivering and designing community development education. Presented here are findings from structured interviews with program participants, instructors, and employers as well as data from four years of participant observation undertaken by the authors (who were managers and instructors in the program). While not intended to be a formal evaluation of the UDP, the study provides new data that could be used as performance measures for other capacity building programs and also provides valuable information about the complexities of managing such programs.

Section 1 reviews the literature on capacity building and community development in the US. Section 2 provides a brief overview of different approaches to capacity building in relation to the field of community development and in particular to CDC’s role in the

production and preservation of affordable housing. We focus on key differences between focused training (short courses and workshops) and traditional higher education programs (undergraduate and graduate level) to describe a hybrid model that stresses experiential learning to not only build skills but also provide to participants an opportunities for critical reflection and experimentation. Section 3 provides an overview of the UDP's organizational structure and curriculum as well as an analysis of interview data to gain insights into the ability of this kind of program to make positive contributions to the different types of CDC capacity.

BUILDING THE CAPACITY OF AFFORDABLE HOUSING PROVIDERS

An estimated 400,000 individuals work in the field of community development nationwide, with many employed by one of 2,000 community development corporations (Brophy and Shabecoff 2001). While CDCs are engaged in many types of development activities, most have as their primary focus the production and preservation of affordable housing (Vidal 1997). Having developed more than 550,000 units since the 1960s, CDC production rates are generally viewed as a response to the reduction of the Federal government's direct role in low-income housing production in the 1980s and the introduction of the Low-Income Housing Tax Credit in 1986.

As the field has grown, more responsibility to implement national affordable housing policy has devolved to non-profit CDCs. Moreover, the housing developed by CDCs is often promoted as an alternative to large-scale public housing developments. CDCs are also branching out from being "just" housing developers and diversifying their missions into other forms of service delivery (Rohe and Bratt 2003). However, while

many organizations engage in efforts to improve the quality of life in neighborhoods and assist lower-income households leave poverty, the available funding—whether from the public or private sector—generally reinforces a “bricks and mortar” or physical development approach to community development (Vidal 1997).

How can these organizations be expected to take on the roles that in the past were played by much larger bureaucracies – especially given shrinking amounts of Federal and private philanthropic funding? Practitioners, funders, and researchers have all identified “capacity” as the quality that will help CDCs survive and thrive. New attention is being given to finding cost-effective ways of producing this capacity to ensure existing groups are able to deliver on their commitments and that new organizations entering the field are equipped to reduce the odds of failing in the future.

Defining and measuring capacity

The overuse of the term “capacity” and the multiple meanings ascribed to it diminishes its value as a descriptive or analytic category. Some conflate it with a community’s fungible assets or resources, while others confuse its presence with the outcomes organizations produce, primarily housing units. In an attempt to make the concept more concrete, the Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) defined capacity building as “an ongoing process that entails developing its leadership and networks, financial resources, human resources, technical resources, and political support for the organization”.¹ Glickman and Servon (1998) further redeemed the notion of capacity by identifying the five distinctive components that allow organizations to carry out their functions more effectively:

- *Resource* capacity, which refers to the ability to get grants, contracts, loans and other funds to meet a group’s objectives;
- *Organizational* capacity, which refers to the internal operations including management style and skill sets of staff and volunteers, but also how staff and the board of directors work together and how human resources are improved through training and education;
- *Programmatic* capacity, which refers to the services the CDC offers, including the building and management of housing, as well as other types of community and leadership development;
- *Network* capacity, which refers to the external relationships that CDC staff and board have with other CBOs, foundations, politicians, and others that can help in raising funds and getting development projects completed; and
- *Political* capacity, which reflects not only the CDC’s ability to represent its constituency in the larger political arena but also to engage and involve residents in decision-making around needs and policy issues.

Their definition includes less tangible measures of organizational functioning and is not narrowly focused on “hard” outcomes, such as number of housing units, which are often but one piece of an organization’s mission. This multi-faceted definition of capacity also allows analysts to systematically measure the presence of different aspects of capacity and to test hypotheses about the extent to which these elements influence different outcomes.

1 See <http://www.oup.org/pubs/rolestrength.html>

Refining the definition allows researchers to examine the factors that may enhance or challenge organizational functioning. In a follow-up piece, Glickman and Servon (2003) found that CDC capacity was enhanced by partnerships with intermediaries, such as the Local Initiatives Support Corporation, that provided operating support and training. The authors surveyed CDCs that were part of Ford Foundation-funded partnerships and measured their responses against a control group of CDCs that were (a) located in the same city as the partnership-funded CDCs but were not part of the partnership and (b) located in different cities and were not part of the partnership in question. They found that partnership CDCs were better equipped in all five areas of capacity – for example, they were more likely to have greater housing outputs (and more efficiently financed units), larger and better-compensated staff, and larger operating budgets.

While this research demonstrates the importance of partnerships, it does not explain exactly *how* such relationships help build capacity. After all, not all partnerships operate in the same manner: some dole out money to CDCs, while others create long-term relationships with organizations. While the former can shore up a financially strapped organization, such assistance does not necessarily increase capacity to keep it going should that funding dry up in the future. What is missing from the current research is an understanding of the *kinds of knowledge* CDCs gain, either in the context of a formal partnership with a community development intermediary or outside of such a relationship. The notion of building capacity implies that new knowledge is learned by individuals working in CDCs, which in turn will be transferred to the organization. How this new knowledge is acquired will affect its ability to change and improve an organization.

For example, many CDCs are staffed by individuals who acquire their knowledge about community development through on-the-job or apprenticeship learning. Characterized by the knowledge gained solely through exposure to the day-to-day tasks (in this case, of real estate development), apprenticeship learning is extremely valuable. However, it can be a poor way to build up the capacity of an organization, especially since it can take many years for a person to develop this knowledge. Moreover, on-the-job learning can be costly if, during the learning process, resources are untapped, underutilized, or mismanaged. Without exposure to the full range of experiences in the field, the apprentice learner's knowledge will be limited, and this can lead to poor decisions about how and when to use limited resources. Furthermore, without the opportunity for critical reflection and analysis, on-the-job experiences that are often isolated and idiosyncratic can appear to be the norm rather than the exception for community developers. In turn, this can affect the assumptions CDCs use in anticipating future actions as well as the quality of decision-making.

As the community development field has grown, organizations that develop affordable housing have found themselves in dire need of skilled personnel with technical acumen, management experience, and leadership ability, as well as sensitivity to the needs of diverse communities. Funders and CDCs alike assume that developing "human capital" will expand and improve the capacity of organizations, which in turn will lead to more affordable housing and more stable communities. The field of community development education has reorganized to respond to these needs and mandates, with services including technical assistance from professional consultants and on-the-job training for staff to learn specific skills through workshops and short courses. More recently, attention has turned to the role higher education can play in this

process, particularly with the rise of community-university partnerships over the last ten years. It is now common to find universities and colleges offering technical assistance, as well as training in the form of workshops, short courses, certificate and traditional degree programs. We explore how these different educational strategies are intended to build capacity in the following section.

COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT EDUCATION AND EXPERIENTIAL LEARNING

Different delivery mechanisms for CDC training have different underlying theories of knowledge creation and acquisition. Delivery mechanisms include workshops and short courses, which are intense and focused on building specific skills, as well as traditional education programs, which are generally spread over a longer time horizon and may produce multiple skills. While both may affect the long-term capacity of organizations and the field itself, these two kinds of training reflect opposite ends of the training spectrum in terms of time commitment and knowledge transfer.² Falling in between is a “hybrid” model of professional training that is skills-focused but is provided over a longer time frame than workshops.

All three approaches can result in what education scholars and organizational psychologists refer to as “experiential learning”. According to Kolb (1984), experiential learning takes place in four stages: concrete experience, reflective observation, abstract conceptualizations, and active experimentation. To develop competencies, the learner needs to proceed through each stage so that in the last stage – active experimentation – they are ready to begin again, integrating new knowledge into a varied and complex assortment of professional settings. In this sense, learning is

envisioned as a continuous spiral even though the cycle can be entered at any of the four stages (Kolb and Fry 1975). Direct encounters with the subject matter, rather than thinking about some phenomenon at a distance, is what sets experiential learning apart from other philosophies of knowledge acquisition.

White and Magnolis (1997) point out how most traditional forms of learning emphasize only one of the four stages. Theories of experiential learning advocate for educational programs that encourage the learner to proceed through the different stages and to ultimately reach the fourth stage of active experimentation. Ideally, the experimentation would occur while a student is still in the classroom so that they can receive feedback from instructors that would allow them to better reflect on their experience, incorporate what has been learned, and potentially change their practices and theories (Kolb 1984; see also Schön 1983). However, the rhythm of work and life does not always guarantee such opportunities. To offset this limitation, the learning process must also help professionals develop their critical thinking skills outside of the educational program, so that each participant enhances their own capacity to complete the cycle of learning on their own in the future.

The onus is on instructors to create a setting for experiential learning. This requires the possession of current knowledge of a professional field that, for the most part, cannot be gleaned from books or articles. Instead this knowledge must be gained from hands-on experience with the subject that can come from one's work or from discussions with practitioners working in the field. At the same time, instructors

² While consultants provide valuable expertise to CDCs, we do not consider this "training" for the purpose of the article since sharing their expertise involves a more limited form of knowledge transfer.

must be able to abstract from their own specific experiences to help students through all phases of the learning process.

Training programs must cater to an increasingly diverse set of individuals working in the field. CDC staff have different backgrounds, levels of training, experience and knowledge, and career goals. Before the 1990s most employees were members of the community their organizations served, often joining the CDC out of frustration with what was or was not happening in their neighborhoods. Coming from *outside* the neighborhood has become much more common as CDCs seek to hire individuals with some form of experience to help fill technical needs of the organization. In such cases, the individual may be new to the culture of the organization and therefore in need of orientation. Staff time and political capital may be must be expended as the new person works to gain credibility and build trust within the organization and the community.

Workshops and short courses

The number and types of workshops and short courses to help staff within community development organizations attain needed technical skills have grown over the last decade. Perusing the offerings on the National Center for Community Economic Development (NCCED) (<http://www.ncced.org/>) or the National Reinvestment Corporation (NRC) NeighborWorks Training Institute (<http://www.nw.org/>) websites, for example, one will find a range of training and workshop opportunities encompassing everything from marketing development deals to funders to asset management and board development. For individuals who cannot attend workshops or short courses, “on-line” training is also available. Typically offered through

universities, such as The University of Illinois' Non-Profit Certificate program, on-line training allows individuals to virtually connect to the CDC community without having to leave their homes, potentially saving the participant time and money. In addition, organizations such as the Management Assistance Program for Non-Profits in Minneapolis provide materials in the form of “kits” so that CDCs can provide their own in-house training (e.g., <http://www.mapfornonprofits.org/>)

While such training can help staff attain specific skills, workshops and short courses typically do not allow them to practice and hone their new skills before trying them out on the job. As White and Magnolis (1997) point out, these programs are similar to apprenticeships that focus on the concrete experience stage with little opportunity to reflect or abstract from the experience in order to develop more general rules or strategies for future encounters. In part, this is the nature of short courses and workshops—participants are provided information and insights (e.g., through a simulation or role playing exercise) with little opportunity to put what they have learned to use with some level of supervision and feedback. Even within a longer time frame, many workshops or training sessions are not oriented toward helping participants understand a complex process, such as affordable housing development, in a comprehensive manner. Instead, they are focused on learning specific skills within the larger process (e.g., accurately calculating the total development costs and completing the development pro forma for a multifamily building). Although on-line training and workshops may be effective at meeting demand for targeted education, such focused curriculum is not necessarily designed to facilitate discussion of larger questions about the factors shaping the development of affordable housing.

Traditional professional education programs

As the field of community development has grown, more people are entering professional educational programs to build their skills and acquire credentials before they seek work. Programs in urban planning, social work, and sociology, for example, often offer community development as a concentration (see listing in Brophy and Shabecoff 2001). Most of these programs are offered at the graduate level, providing students an opportunity to obtain a master degree that attests to a certain level of professional competency. Designed to educate people from diverse backgrounds, these programs take an average of two years to complete if attended full-time. During this time students are exposed to the myriad issues they are likely to confront when they graduate and practice. Students also generally get the opportunity to develop a wide range of skills through exposure in the classroom and practice in the form of homework, in-class exercises, and projects. For example, the community development curriculum may offer students a real estate class where they develop pro forma and may include some form of simulation using a case study or working for a client to learn how to structure and finance an affordable housing deal. Students may also participate in a studio class that works with a real organization or government agency to provide technical assistance and results in some type of work product (e.g., a strategic plan, program evaluation, or community needs assessment) (Dewar and Isaac 1998).

For individuals already working in the community development field and seeking skills, the additional knowledge required in most educational programs (e.g., theories of community development; microeconomics) and the time it takes to gain this knowledge is often unappealing. For people new to the field, the extra time spent on

building this broader knowledge base, along with practical job skills, is expected to pay off by providing access to jobs that they would not be qualified for without their degree. However, given the expense involved in on-the-job training, some employers are hesitant to hire new graduates who lack a modicum of “real world” experience. This is a limitation of any educational program, since it can only give students so much experience outside the classroom and only so much exposure to the reality of working in an organization. For these reasons, traditional professional educational programs tend to be stuck in the reflective observation and abstract conceptualization phases of the experiential learning process.

Hybrid programs

Hybrid programs have been developed to deal with the shortcomings of training workshops and traditional educational models by combining features of both. Hybrid educational programs exist for applied and professional disciplines where both conceptual and operational knowledge is needed (see Roakes and Norris-Tirrell 2000). They have the potential to guide the learner through the four stages of experiential learning.

Perhaps the best-known program of this type for community development is the Southern New Hampshire University Master of Science in Community Economic Development, which began in 1982. Designed as a weekend program, participants come from around the country to attend classes once a month over a two-year period (excluding summers). Besides attending classes to learn skills related to the operation and function of community-based organizations, students develop and work on a project “for their home communities” getting “input, feedback and support for their

projects” from focus groups during the two-year period (see <http://www.snhu.edu/sced.html>). Other programs, such as the Community Development Certificate Program offered at the University of Delaware, provide similar forms of intensive, hands-on training. Instead of a two-year program, the participants meet every weekend for one semester, and participants receive a certificate instead of a degree. In addition, the university offers a range of other community development “institutes” that participants can take to further build organizational capacity (see <http://www.continuingstudies.udel.edu/noncredit/#community>). Both the New Hampshire and Delaware programs help to build skills that can launch a new initiative and/or organization.

A hybrid approach to training entails designing the classroom experience to help current professionals incorporate new conceptual knowledge that will enhance or expand on their lived experiences while developing skills that are needed to undertake tasks that they have not yet encountered. In hybrid programs, classroom experiences are no less practical than in workshops. But, by allowing more time for reflective observation, participants are expected to develop a more conceptual but still applied understanding of practice – the basis for the experiential approach to learning.

In contrast to workshops and traditional degree programs, hybrid programs are designed to be “learner-centered.” They provide not only a skills-building curriculum, but a space in which participants work on their own pre-existing projects. Instructors do not simply provide a problem to solve or a case to analyze; each participant works within the specific contexts of their own projects. A limit to this approach, of course, is that it assumes participants are already actively working in the field. And, as is

true for workshops more so than for traditional education, hybrid programs often assume that participants share a specific definition of community development, i.e., as it pertains to the development of affordable housing. This is evident in the selection of instructors, required courses, and topics covered as well as in the nature of the projects that participants bring to the program.

Hybrid programs can also be very difficult to administer, particularly when they depend on partnerships between professional and academic institutions. Different kinds of knowledge are valued differently in these different contexts. The ideals of intellectual pursuit that guide the university, for example, emphasize knowledge that is generalizable, verifiable, and overtly theoretical. In contrast, practice requires expertise that is tailored to specific situations, outcome-driven, and couched in its own specific jargon of acronyms and insider information. These and other positive and negative aspects of hybrid strategies are highlighted in the following analysis of the Urban Developers Program.

THE URBAN DEVELOPERS PROGRAM

The Urban Developers Program (UDP) is administered jointly by the University of Illinois at Chicago and the Chicago Rehab Network. UDP is an intensive program that is offered over a year-long period. While it is geared toward individuals already working in the field of community-based affordable housing development, it also aims to provide newcomers with skills and experience that can help them to enter the field. As one instructor described the program, “(I)t is different from workshops because of the continuity that the program has. It’s not just one aspect, like someone would come to learn at a workshop. It’s a continuous process where somebody understands

the entire spectrum of affordable housing development.” UDP is a quintessential hybrid program aimed at building capacity in CDCs.

The origin of the UDP traces back to the roots of the Chicago Rehab Network (CRN), which was founded in 1977 by a handful of community organizations seeking to pool expertise and share information about neighborhood redevelopment. The member-based organization has grown in size to now include over 40 housing organizations that work in over 60 city neighborhoods. CRN has also expanded its scope over the past 25 years to conduct research and advocate on behalf of local, state, and national policy issues affecting the production and preservation of affordable housing. As a result, CRN estimates that it has contributed to the development of thousands of affordable housing in the Chicago area.

Initially providing technical assistance to help fledgling rehabbers, CRN began offering a “community development and empowerment series” which consists of eight 2-day workshops that provide participants with specific skills. These skills include training in pro forma development and analysis, financial calculations and computer spreadsheets, and sources of financing, but also broader topics such as community development planning. The UDP began in 1994 as a collaboration between CRN and Spertus College, a small private institution in downtown Chicago. The intention was to offer a one-year program to assist community-based practitioners engaged in the development of affordable housing. In part, this came out of need to go beyond providing technical assistance to its members and others in the field. Many CDCs were branching into new construction and complicated deal-making as well as continuing to undertake rehabilitation projects. As community-based development organizations grew, so too did the need for well-trained staff who could navigate through the many

layers of financing and corresponding legal conditions to bring a project to completion. Equally important was the need for staff who could lease up and manage property once it was completed and keep it in compliance with government regulations over time.

While CRN's community development and empowerment series provides in-depth knowledge of specific topics, the UDP was designed to tie these skills together so that CDC staff could learn all components of development process. After graduating more than 30 students in two years, Spertus College decided that the program no longer fit its mission and ended its commitment. CRN then approached the University of Illinois at Chicago (UIC) in the fall of 1997 and began negotiations to deliver the program at the university. UIC, a public research university and the largest institution of higher education in the Chicago area, had recently formalized its mission to create, disseminate, and apply interdisciplinary knowledge about urban affairs under the rubric of the Great Cities Initiative. Currently, CRN and UIC's College of Urban Planning and Public Affairs (CUPPA) jointly sponsor the program, whose administration is housed and funded through the Great Cities Institute.³ Oversight of the curriculum and admissions is the responsibility of a representative of the Urban Planning and Policy Program, an academic unit within CUPPA. The degree program is technically responsible for all UDP courses, which are listed as courses within the unit.

Designed specifically for adult learners, UDP offers six courses over a one-year period (August-July). Classes meet every three weeks from a Friday afternoon through

³UDP is dependent on external funding sources to cover much of its operating costs. Tuition for the entire twelve-month certificate program began at \$7,000 in 1999 but was reduced to \$4,500 because of scholarships available through the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development, the Fannie Mae Foundation, and the John D. and Catherine T. MacArthur

Saturday evening. Each UDP course is taught by a team of three to six instructors and is led by a course manager, who serves as both a course coordinator and point of contact for students. The instructors include both faculty and staff in CUPPA and experienced practitioners in community development from the Chicago region. Of the current pool of practitioner-instructors, most are employed as executive directors of community development corporations or as research directors for local research and advocacy organizations. Course managers tend to be CUPPA faculty or staff holding doctoral degrees (in which case, they are appointed as adjunct faculty). They are responsible for designing the course, evaluating student work, and coordinating the work of the individual instructors.

The content of the courses is designed to meet the needs of students developing affordable housing and involved in other aspects of community development practice. The courses range from overviews of U.S. housing policy to managing non-profits (see Figure 1). Each course is intended to build several different kinds of capacity in the student and the student's employer. Although the UDP is distinct from both the Masters in Urban Planning and Planning (MUPP) degree offered by CUPPA and the various training workshops offered by CRN, the content also overlaps in some places. For example, a similar Development Finance course is offered in both the MUPP and UDP programs. However, the breadth of the UDP course, particularly the amount of time spent working through and then practicing pro forma construction, distinguishes it from the single-issue workshops offered by CRN while its focus, which is solely on affordable housing development, distinguishes it from the MUPP program.

{insert Figure 1 here}

Foundation. If students are employed by a Community Housing Development Organization

Representatives of CRN and CUPPA review applications for admission into the program. The admissions committee accepts students based on several criteria, including: employment or involvement in the field of community development, probability of completing the program, ability to do graduate-level work, and identification of a particular development project that will form the basis for several class projects. For the four years that the program has been housed at UIC, it has admitted approximately 90 students, 70 of which subsequently enrolled and matriculated.

UDP students come from diverse backgrounds and pathways to community development (see Figure 2). Some have been employees of CDCs, tax credit syndicators, social service providers, and advocacy organizations. Others have been public servants or self-employed rehabbers, or are contemplating a career change. The students represent a wide range of prior experience, from executive directors of CDCs and a former state senator to younger students recently graduated from college and looking for a challenging and socially fulfilling profession. Some of the students are already familiar with CRN and work for established organizations that are active within CRN's network. Others arrive from small, faith-based organizations that have recently made a transition to housing production. Most are from the Chicago region.

{insert Figure 2 here}

Although their motivations for joining the program are not homogeneous and sometimes are not fully-formed, interviews with former students revealed that their interests in acquiring skills and gaining more knowledge about the overall field led them to UDP. Some graduates stated that during the late 1990s, they simply could not make affordable housing “work” in their gentrifying neighborhoods, and even the most experienced practitioners had become desperate for new

(CHDO), they are likely to receive a substantial scholarship to cover the majority of the tuition.

ideas. Said one graduate, “It was 1999, and we didn’t know where to go, what to do, how to approach the problem – I mean we knew how to approach the problem but we didn’t have the necessary tools. Here in the office nobody had the experience.” Although it was often difficult to take the time off to attend UDP, most found that their employers were supportive of their decision to enroll in the program because they valued the professional development of their staff.⁴

Students are particularly interested in receiving academic credit and for recognition for their work in the field. This was the primary strength (and challenge) of a partnership involving a research university. UIC contributed its ability to confer credentials as a degree-granting institution and the legitimacy of a state school system, especially one that was developing a national reputation for engaged research. One of the former students noted that despite the fact that he had several years of experience in the field, he enrolled in the program “first and foremost to get the degree... It’s too much work to put into a program without getting something concrete that can really stay with you.” Along with these contributions, however, come an often rigid policing of academic standards that is associated credential-granting institutions (Wiewel and Lieber 1998). UIC, for example, initially required that UDP students have bachelors’ degrees regardless of their years of experience in the field. The university saw such requirements as protecting standards, while other stakeholders viewed them as confirmation of the academy’s inherent elitism. The university also took a long time to consider UDP courses sufficiently academic to count for graduate level credit.

A key challenge when designing and implementing UDP was establishing these admissions and instructor selection criteria as well as the standards for graduate-level coursework. A group of

⁴ The program requires that all applicants obtain a letter of support from their employer stating that they will be given sufficient release time to attend the program.

committed individuals worked hard to refine the admissions review process, administration, and program guidelines in order to satisfy both sides of the partnership. This helped to develop the trust necessary for the program to continue and thrive.

The structure of the partnership was also able to create incentives for additional commitment on the part of the university and CRN. Once the value of the credit transfer was negotiated, CUPPA was pleased that the UDP could be treated as a “feeder program” for its two-year MUPP degree. CRN also saw the program as a feeder and instructor pool for its ongoing series of training workshops. Because there are few institutional rewards for faculty participation, the program offers them a salary “bonus” to become course managers in the program. This incentive structure helped to institutionalize the partnership and make it easier to pursue common goals.

Methodology

The primary objective of the UDP program is to increase the capacity of organizations and individuals working for CDCs. In the following section, we analyze the program’s ability to fulfill this objective based on the framework for identifying capacity provided by Glickman and Servon (1998), a series of semi-structured interviews with graduates, instructors, and staff, and participant observation on the part of the authors. The five aspects of capacity that Glickman and Servon describe provide an excellent starting point for evaluating training programs. This framework assists practitioners in developing *ex ante* benchmarks that subsequent performance can be measured against as well as allowing analysts to systematically measure the creation of different kinds of capacity *ex post*.

Informants were selected by representatives from UIC and CRN to reflect a diversity of views and experiences, cohorts, personal histories, and backgrounds in community development.⁵ A consultant who was not directly affiliated with the UDP was chosen to conduct the interviews using a structured discussion guide developed by representatives of the partnership. Interviews were completed with 8 students and 4 instructors (2 of whom also employed UDP participants) in March 2002. The questions were intended to gain a better understanding of the strengths and weaknesses of the program in order to identify areas for improvement; they were not specifically geared toward understanding the different aspects of capacity. Instead, the authors examined the transcripts after interviews were completed to find evidence of improved or diminished organizational functioning. Certain interviews have been quoted at length because they are particularly illustrative. The authors also drew from their own experiences teaching and administering the program over a period of four years.

The small number of interview subjects (due in part to the small number of program graduates) and the reliance on participant observation introduces a certain degree of subjectivity into the analysis. Lacking data on students before and after they entered the program as well as data on other attributes of their organizations, it is impossible to demonstrate in a definitive manner whether the program is responsible for the (positive and negative) outcomes which are attributed to it by informants. Rather than make strong causal claims about the effect of the program, the authors instead seek to

⁵ As with most forms of non-random sampling, the need for substantial variation in the individuals selected (in terms of prior experience in community development and with similar training programs) overrode concerns about potential selection bias in the sample.

provide a balanced, descriptive account of its strengths and shortcomings as they pertain to capacity building.

Capacity building through experiential learning

Resource capacity: CDCs must be able to secure resources to cover operating and program costs, or they put their own survival at risk. One student noted that the notion of community development is, in fact, an oxymoron because “the people from the community generally don’t have the money to dictate what is developed.”

Therefore, it is necessary to develop relationships beyond the boundaries of the neighborhood to raise funds.

The UDP addresses the issue of resource capacity in several ways. First, students learn about the financial management of non-profit organizations throughout the program, but particularly in their Organizational Essentials course. They learn, for example, creative ways of supporting their organizations when city, state, and federal agencies are behind in their payments. They grapple with the challenges of seeking financing for individual development projects while avoiding the problems of budget shortfalls and low operating reserves. Second, students are exposed to the different public and private sources of financing for the development of affordable housing. In the Housing Policy and Development Finance classes, students learn about the history of the different sources, the eligibility requirements for each of them, and how to integrate them into their development budgets and pro forma. At the end of the program, they are able to conduct financial feasibility analysis for projects with multiple sources.

Third, as part of their classes and site visits, students personally meet with funders, including, for example, representatives of the Illinois Housing Development Authority, the Chicago

Department of Housing, and the National Equity Fund. These introductions bring funders into the students' networks. Fourth, and related to the issue of organizational capacity, government agencies and philanthropies view organizations that employ UDP graduates as being more competent, and this perception often influences the amount of funding they are willing to provide. One developer mentioned that the year she told the City of Chicago's Department of Housing that she had enrolled in the UDP program, her allotment from a city program increased by \$10,000. She attributed this increase to her participation in the program.

Organizational capacity: Many CDCs are understaffed, overworked, and lack the management and development skills to operate effectively. At the same time, they are developing and managing a growing portfolio of rental housing, co-ops, Section 8, tax credit, and bond issue properties, some of which rely on funding sources that are about to expire. The UDP program is primarily geared toward enhancing the knowledge necessary to overcome these problems. In the program, students learn everything from how to incorporate as a non-profit in the state of Illinois to how to work with a board of directors. All the students interviewed mentioned that they used the technical skills they learned in the program -- e.g., spreadsheets and financial calculators -- on a daily basis at their jobs. One graduate mentioned that a study of neighborhood demographics completed for a UDP class became the basis for his CDC's strategic plan.

Providing and acquiring these skills is not always easy. Students, some of whom have not been in a university classroom in twenty years, have to adjust to the culture of the university. After learning skills on the job for some many years, some are not accustomed to gaining knowledge through reading, writing, and attending classes (see also Dewar and Issac 1998, 337). Frustrations flair if practitioners do not take their

roles as students seriously -- ignoring deadlines, missing classes (often because of legitimate work conflicts), or not completing the required reading. In fact, the UDP coordinator had to respond to some faculty complaints by developing “learning contracts” for students that outlined the program’s expectations of them.

Conversely, faculty must constantly update their understanding of what is currently taking place in community development to provide the right skills. A lack of savvy and street credibility (e.g., not knowing about the mechanics of a new City program) could undermine the students’ respect for their instructor. Instructors, whether UIC faculty or an experienced executive director at a CDC, also have to be open to learning from the UDP students.

Once acquired, the technical skills learned through the UDP enabled students to advance within and outside their organizations. In a sense, the program substitutes for several rungs in the community development career ladder. Increasing the skills of staff allows small organization to take on new responsibilities. One graduate noted that UDP helped her to manage and grow her organization from a one- to a three-person office. One of the unintended consequences of the program may be that, after the program, students take these marketable skills to the for-profit development field and leave their community organizations.

Employing a highly skilled staff allows employers to avoid spending scarce dollars on outside consultants and helps staff to better evaluate the work of consultants. One graduate became, “knowledgeable enough to talk with consultants that we were contracting with about what it was that we wanted, as opposed to what the consultant wanted.” One instructor noted that it was important to have the program focus so much time on the technical skills because:

I would never trust a consultant to run my numbers. The consultant works directly for you and supposedly is representing your interests, so you have to check everybody's numbers all the time....You're always making changes (to the spreadsheets), and if you don't understand the parameters of the way the project works, or where it stops working...you can't control your project. These same skills also allow students to be better partners with other for-profit entities.

UDP also helps to enhance more intangible kinds of skills. One employer noted that the largest change in the employee he sent through the program was "confidence, absolutely number one... I can send (her) out there to do (her) own job... and not have to babysit (her)." The employer had recently promoted this graduate and having already sent two of his staff to the program, plans to send a third. Other students mentioned that they felt "empowered" by the experience of learning from the experts in the field, by which they meant both their instructors and their fellow classmates.

Programmatic capacity: The curriculum of UDP is geared toward improving the ability of CDCs to build and manage affordable housing. Their ability to do so influences the resource and organizational capacities of the CDC. As one instructor succinctly noted, "The revenue that comes off of these projects will either allow you to further your social service mission, or the developer fee that you get enables you to further your social service mission, hopefully, and to keep providing this good quality housing for people."

Courses on the Role of the Developer and Sustaining the Housing help students to oversee development projects from pre-construction through asset management. Topics studied in the program relate directly to the projects that most of the students are working on during the time in which they are enrolled. In fact, one of the admissions criteria of the program is that students come with a particular

development project to work on over the year.⁶ One student came with a project that she had been involved with for several years: rehabilitating a historically significant YMCA that was constructed in 1912 to aid the growing number of African-Americans migrants to Chicago with housing and cultural programming. Her organization, a coalition of three churches, rehabbed 101 efficiency apartments and constructed centers for health, fitness, and community learning on the premises. This project recently won the Neighborhood Development Award for best non-profit development project in the City of Chicago.

Another benefit of participating in the program is that students and their organizations are eligible for free technical assistance for their own development projects. A small budget supports the work of staff at the Voorhees Center for Neighborhood and Community Improvement, a research center at CUPPA.

Organizations apply to the UDP, explaining the nature of their assistance needed, and, if approved, their projects are referred to the Voorhees Center. Voorhees staff worked with eight organizations between 1997 and 2002, with assistance ranging from strategic planning to rent studies. In one case, staff provided assistance in identifying sites, preparing preliminary cost estimates, and submitting a request for city owned lots for the Interfaith Organizing Project on the City's West Side. The request was subsequently approved, and an application is pending with the City to fund 27 two-flats under its New Homes for Chicago Program (a developer and purchaser subsidy for affordable owner-occupied homes).

⁶ If students were not employed by a CDC or lacked a specific project, staff worked with them and with the instructors to find them one.

Several graduates attributed their subsequent successes to knowledge about techniques and organizing accrued through the program. Several students, for example, mentioned that UDP made them realize the importance of community participation at different stages of the development. One student noted that she applied a class discussion on the challenges of asset management directly to how her organization selected families to participate in their homeownership program. Another student entered into the program having only developed single-family homes, but she is currently working on a LIHTC project for 40 units of affordable rental housing. UDP instructors walked this student through the process of successfully acquiring several tax delinquent properties from her local government.

Rather than assign the same exercises to all students, hybrid programs often guide students through their own individual projects. UDP requires that students come in with their own projects, which they do in different phases of completion. Sometimes the knowledge learned in the classroom is not directly or immediately applicable to their project. Noted one former participant, “It was difficult to get the real world project and the classroom experiences to match up directly. You weren’t at the lease up stage yet but you were learning about property management.”

Through the program, students refine their ability to distinguish between projects that their organization should or should not pursue. One graduate mentioned that the program helped him to convince his board that a particular development project was feasible and also to convince two established CDCs that his community organization was capable of partnering with them on a co-op project. He noted,

We're trying to buy at least 6,000 square feet of property, and I'm going to be in charge of doing the development, getting the people to work together. I have the knowledge... I'm going to be calling architects so they can come in and talk to me, having all the people coming in here, I'm going to organize them... so now we feel a little more relaxed.

After taking the Sustaining the Housing class, one student realized that her organization was not large enough to take on the responsibility of property management for its new development. She also determined that a facility for battered women would not be feasible given the high costs of acquisition in her neighborhood.

Although the UDP and other hybrid models of community development education may teach students to think critically about the tools they use, most still approach community development primarily in terms of physical development, i.e., bricks and mortar projects. UDP students get the opportunity to debate whether CDCs are simply pass-throughs for government money or whether building housing is really the best way to alleviate poverty, but in the end they are there to learn how to implement housing programs: structure deals, manage the development process, and create shelter. Other approaches to community development, such as issues-based organizing or asset accumulation, garner less attention (Stoeker 1997). The fact that this model of education draws heavily on practitioners to teach means that instructors themselves, at some level, have bought into the idea that housing development is an effective way to revitalize neighborhoods. While such practitioners are well positioned to point out the problems and challenges of the current system, not all are necessarily concerned with asking questions about its origins or changing it.

Network capacity: Another more intangible outcome of the UDP program is its ability to broaden the professional networks of the students and, by association, those of the organizations where they are employed. Students in the UDP form a distinct cohort, taking the same classes together for a full year (as opposed to a weekend workshop or the full master's program, where students take different classes with different classmates). They have to take a one-week, full-time Cohort Seminar when they first start the program that seeks to build camaraderie among the new students. Moreover, the structure of many of the class assignments and projects requires students to work together collaboratively on teams. All students interviewed noted that they have kept up with at least two of their classmates – most often in a professional context. One mentioned that her entire class celebrated with her when she closed the loan on a particularly difficult building. She also pointed out that the program allowed for inter-generational learning and friendships, between, for example, a 55-year old community organizer and a recent college graduate.

These networks serve several useful purposes. First, they act as a labor pool from which to hire qualified staff. The community development career ladder tends to be horizontal, rather than vertical and internal to one organization. Staff tend to circulate between organizations, drawing on knowledge gained in specific settings. The knowledge gained through the UDP program appears to be very portable, and there are many cases of students hiring each other. One graduate hired one of his instructors as a consulting developer as well as one of his former classmates as a staff person. Second, the network acts as a way of sustaining and supplementing the knowledge gained from the one-year program. One graduate mentioned that she often calls her former classmates and instructors with questions about grant programs and even mundane financial calculations. An instructor noted that sharing information is especially important in the non-profit world because of the relative lack of financial power and the necessity of knowledge for organizing large groups of people around a particular mission.

Political capacity: In providing the technical skills of development, exposure to leaders in the field, and opportunities to network, the UDP program also enhances the ability of CDCs to represent their interests and negotiate for constituency benefits. In the Cohort Seminar and the Organizational Essentials class, students discuss the role of vision and leadership in community development. Exposure to the history of housing policy and different paradigms of community development from different instructors helps students to identify diverse and often conflicting perspectives on their work. This awareness allows them to become more savvy dealmakers because they can better identify what City agencies or lenders really want. A combination of broad visions and sensitivity to the interests of different stakeholders is critical to the political success of community development.

One graduate mentioned that the hardest thing about community development is learning how to get people, whether neighborhood residents or local officials, to buy into the CDC's particular vision. This involves packaging and marketing that vision in a way that appeals to the different stakeholders. Another graduate mentioned that when he talks with the Chicago Housing Authority, what he brings to the table that others do not is the "broader sense that we're building a community here." Packaging his vision in this way allows him to argue persuasively for additional concessions from the Authority.

An understanding of the political and ideological dynamics underlying development practice helps students become better advocates for affordable housing policies. Many students identified a sense of their own politicization as a positive outcome of UDP.

One noted,

It's like all of a sudden we're at the statehouse all the time. One of my staff people is co-chair of our Continuum of Care (in which several non-profits form a group to plan for homeless services funded in part by HUD). We end up advocating for a lot related to housing development. I'm also now on the board of the Statewide Housing Providers Association... (Learning about history and policy helped me to understand) why things are the way that they are: why we need non-profit housing development, and what its role is throughout the nation.

Another student felt that, through the program, she had become a more adept user of Low Income Housing Tax Credits but at the same time developed a very critical stance on them as a public policy. She noted that:

Now I'm an advocate of *not* using low income housing tax credits. Not because of its difficulty, but because of the amount of money that it takes to do one of these deals. Even though the developers can get huge developers fees, which is why they do it, I find that it offers no benefit to the end user. All the benefits are to the developer, the attorneys make big money, the syndicators, everyone makes money, and then the end user, the person renting the apartment, all this money and they get an apartment whose rent wasn't even low.

While this position may not reflect all that participate in the program, it does demonstrate an important awareness gained by most that our current system of developing affordable housing is often very expensive because of the added cost that comes with using tools like the LIHTC, and that CDCs are unable to make significant changes in the system unless they work to change legislation change and deal with social justice issues. For some, this awareness has made them more active outside their communities working on policy changes at all levels of government. For example,

several UDP alumni have joined a coalition formed to get the City of Chicago to adopt a set-aside law for affordable housing, while others worked to get state legislation passed to require a more equitable distribution of affordable housing for very low-income families. For others, the training and new knowledge coupled with new connections in the field has helped them move out of development and into a different level and/or role in the community development process including banking, for-profit affordable housing development, foundations, and local government.

CONCLUSION

This article describes a hybrid model of community development education that aims to address the challenges currently faced by CDCs, notably the increased competition for funding, lack of staff expertise, and changing public policies. Combining elements of short-term workshops for existing staff with aspects of a university-based degree program, the Urban Developers Program seeks to nurture the five aspects of capacity necessary to both CDC survival and the development of affordable housing. Many training programs focus solely on the resource and programmatic components of capacity in order to increase the number of affordable housing units CDCs develop. Interviews with program participants revealed that while UDP appeared to boost production rates, it also was able to address the need among community-based organizations to expand professional networks, develop good board relations, select the most appropriate projects, and increase organizational learning.

Interviews with a sample of UDP graduates and instructors revealed that the program had achieved several of its capacity-building goals. Indeed, the UDP has been recognized by the Fannie Mae Foundation as a “Promising Practice” and by others as a model to replicate across the country (Fannie Mae Foundation 2001).

A loftier objective of UDP, however, is to change the system in which affordable housing is constructed. The advantage of hybrid programs is that students learn the basic skills necessary to build affordable housing but do so in a context removed from the day-to-day of their work lives that encourages reflection and critique. By promoting all four stages of experiential learning (concrete experience, reflective observation, abstract conceptualizations, and active experimentation), the hybrid approach can help participants enhance their understanding of both the knowledge they already possess and that which they are acquiring in school. In this way, we argue that the program moves training beyond short-term remedies for immediate problems to provide a broad foundation for analyzing the inherited system of housing development and suggesting organizing tactics to change it (see also Stoecker 2003). As the interviews demonstrate, students learn to use the tools available to them (such as the Low Income Housing Tax Credit) while both questioning the value, efficiency, and unintended consequences of the same tools and experimenting with alternatives. Seeing the limits of existing strategies has led many students to become involved in legislative politics. This is perhaps a sixth kind of capacity—the capacity to alter the parameters of the system in which CDCs operate, not just for the benefit of the individual organization but for the industry as a whole.

A down side to hybrid methods of delivering community development education is that they can be very difficult to manage, particularly when they are administered jointly by universities and community organizations. As described in the section about the UDP structure, the interests of the two partners were initially at odds around admissions and instructor selection criteria and the assignment of university credit for coursework. Moreover, participants, particularly those who had not been in a classroom in twenty years, also had to balance their identities as both

working professionals and college students. Although the relative superiority of action-oriented knowledge compared to academically based knowledge was a debate that undergird the development of the program, most participants came to recognize that generalizations and false dichotomies stood in the way of appreciating what was ultimately a hybrid form of knowing. Moreover, the mutual interest in contributing to the region's affordable housing stock and enhancing the capacity of CDCs superseded the reservations of each party. While the program certainly has much room to grow, the hybrid approach it models represents an attractive form of community development education at a time when the non-profit sector is taking on increasing responsibility for shelter, service delivery, and poverty alleviation.

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Figure 1 Curriculum and program structure

<p>Cohort seminar</p> <p>Orientation - program overview, structure, introduction to partners and instructors Cohort formation - intensive time to quickly develop student relationships Skills building - calculator, spreadsheets, financial/real estate basics, research basics</p>		<p>Summer 1 week</p>
<p>Development finance</p> <p>Financial markets Developing an operating pro forma Sources of real estate information Market analysis Complex pro formas Debt financing Equity financing Grants and rental subsidies</p>	<p>Housing and community development policy</p> <p>What is community development? History of community development in US US housing policy Role of non-profits in housing Neighborhood change Fair housing Linking housing and economic development Relationship between production and organizing</p>	<p>Fall 16 week semester</p>
<p>Development Process</p> <p>Development team Pre-development expenses Acquisition strategies Forms of ownership to maintain affordability Components of assessments The lender and loan closing process Title, escrow and real estate taxes Risk and sustainability</p>	<p>Organizational essentials</p> <p>Community development vision Strategic planning Mission-based/values based work Hiring strategies Defining/understanding leadership Organizational structure Legal issues and skills Communications</p>	<p>Spring 16 week semester</p>
<p>Sustaining the housing</p> <p>Property management basics Asset management basics Short and long-term capital needs Blending property and asset management Relationship between development and community</p>		<p>Summer 8 weeks</p>

Figure 2 UDP enrollment profile, academic years 1999-2000 through 2002-2003

Number of participants...	Absolute number	Percentage of total (n=70)
Employed by non-profit organizations	52	74%
Employed by community housing development organizations (CHDO)	37	52%
With advanced degrees	12	17%
Enrolled in the Master's Degree in Urban Planning Program (MUPP)	8	11%
Of minority status	48	67%