

April 16-18, 2013 | Toronto, Ontario

# Champions for Change:

## Leading a Backbone Organization for Collective Impact

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**MAYTREE**

For Leaders. For Change.

**SiG**



**THE J.W. McCONNELL  
FAMILY FOUNDATION**

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# Defining the Role of the Backbone Organization Today's Conversation

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- I. Overview of Research Defining Roles of the Backbone**
- II. Pod Discussion on Backbone Roles**
- III. Large Group Discussion**
- IV. Practitioner Panel**

## **FSG Worked With GCF and Six Backbone Organization Grantees to Learn More about the Backbone Role**

- ✓ **Defined a common “backbone” Theory of Change and core backbone roles**
- ✓ **Collected perspectives on the backbone role and characteristics from backbone organizations and stakeholders in their initiatives**
- ✓ **Facilitated shared learning opportunities for the backbone organizations**

## Six Core Functions for the Backbone Organization

Guide Vision and Strategy

Support Aligned Activities

Establish Shared Measurement Practices

Build Public Will

Advance Policy

Mobilize Funding

***Backbones must balance the tension between coordinating and maintaining accountability, while staying behind the scenes to establish collective ownership***

## Common Misperceptions about the Role of Backbone Organizations

### Common Misperceptions

- The backbone organization **sets the agenda** for the group
- The backbone organization **drives the solutions**
- The backbone organization **receives all the funding**
- The role of backbone **can be self appointed** rather than selected by the community
- The role of backbone **isn't fundamentally different from “business as usual”** in terms of staffing, time, and resources

## Effective Backbone Leaders Share Common Characteristics

Stakeholders describe backbone organization leaders as:

***Visionary***

***Results-Oriented***

***Collaborative, Relationship Builder***

***Focused, but Adaptive***

***Charismatic and Influential Communicator***

***Politic***

***Humble***

***“Someone who has a big picture perspective—[who] understands how the pieces fit together, is sensitive to the dynamics, and is energetic and passionate.”***

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# Pod Discussion

- How do the 6 roles presented align with the **work that you are doing**?
- How would you **modify** or add to these roles to make them more relevant to describing your work? – *Use yellow stickies*
- What do you think are the **most important** roles in creating change in your community? – *Use green stickies*
- Which roles are the **most difficult**? – *Use pink stickies*

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## Panel Discussion



**Shiloh Turner**  
Greater Cincinnati Foundation



**Bill Scheyer**  
Vision 2015



**Stephanie Byrd**  
Success by 6



**Mary Stagaman**  
Agenda 360



**Ross Meyer**  
Partners for a  
Competitive Workforce

# Backup Slides

## Six Key Functions for the Backbone Organization

### Guide Vision and Strategy

- Build a **common understanding of the problem**
- Provide **strategic guidance** to develop a common agenda

### Support Aligned Activities

- Ensure **mutually reinforcing activities** take place:
  - **Coordinate and facilitate** communication and collaboration
  - **Convene** partners and key external stakeholders
  - **Catalyze or incubate** new initiatives or collaborations
  - Provide **technical assistance**
  - Create **paths for, and recruit, new partners**
  - Seek **opportunities for alignment** with other efforts

### Establish Shared Measurement Practices

- Collect, analyze, interpret, and report **data**
- Catalyze or develop **shared measurement systems**
- Provide technical assistance for building partners' **data capacity**

### Build Public Will

- Build public will, consensus and commitment:
  - **Create a sense of urgency** and articulate a call to action
  - Support **community member engagement** activities
  - Produce and manage **external communications**

### Advance Policy

- Advocate for an aligned **policy agenda**

### Mobilize Funding

- Mobilize and align public and private **funding to support goals**

# Common Characteristics of Effective Backbone Leadership

## Visionary

- “In addition to setting the agenda items, she has a **very clear vision** of where we need to focus and has the ability to drive focus towards those.”

## Results-Oriented

- “This is a really results-oriented staff, and they are **constantly pushing** the community and all of us to not just talk about something, but **to act** on it.”

## Collaborative, Relationship Builder

- “[Her] style is a **collaborator, consensus builder**, she works very well with partners. We do a good job with making everyone feel like they’re important.”

## Focused, but Adaptive

- “[There is a] combination of **laser focus, a willingness to listen** to almost any idea, [and an ability to] cut to the chase and not act on every idea. They are so focused on being sure that whatever is done is focused on the end goal.”

## Charismatic and Influential Communicator

- “Like any job, **passion** is number one... No one will be as interested as when someone is passionate about the subject.”
- “[She] is extraordinarily **articulate and passionate** about her work and...she is a true leader in the field.”

## Politic

- “Probably a little **political savvy**, and more of an **ability to filter** what they say than I have. [He] understands **when to listen**.”

## Humble

- “You **can’t have a big ego** – you need to have high standards, but you can’t want the **credit**.”
- “[He] sees himself as a ‘**servant-leader**’.”

**“Someone who has a big picture perspective—[who] understands how the pieces fit together, is sensitive to the dynamics, and is energetic and passionate.”**