The Strong Field Project 2011 Annual Evaluation Progress Report

Executive Summary

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Executive Summary

This 2011 Annual Progress Report represents a critical milestone in the implementation of the Strong Field Project (SFP) and our evaluation of progress toward key SFP outcomes. The timing of the report reflects the different stages occupied by the three SFP strategies. The end of 2011 marked the completion of Cohort 1's participation in the Leadership Development Program (LDP), which enabled us to focus on the substantive progress made toward key LDP outcomes and relate the many powerful stories of impact from leaders' participation. On the other hand, due to the ongoing nature of Organizational Strength Grants (OSG) and Network Building and Knowledge Sharing (NB/KS), we used a more process-oriented lens to analyze the available data for this report.

Overall, our analysis shows that progress has been made on a number of the short- and intermediate-term SFP outcomes. As summarized in the chart below, very good to excellent progress has been made to date on Outcome 1 (increases in individual skills in management and leadership) and on Outcome 5 (creative and effective tools, practices, models and collaborations to address domestic violence). Progress toward these outcomes was made possible by the intentional design and execution of CompassPoint and the Women's Foundation of California's areas of responsibility. SFP partners have also made some noticeable progress on Outcome 4 (new, diverse individual and organizational stakeholders engaged with DV organizations) and on Outcome 2 (measurable improvements in organizational strength). Less success has been reported on Outcome 3 (stronger DV networks and field capacity to network and collaborate to promote peer learning & share best practices) and on Outcome 6 (a rich and relevant knowledge base useful to the DV field). This suggests that the SFP will need to turn its attention to some of the longer-term outcomes in the next two years.
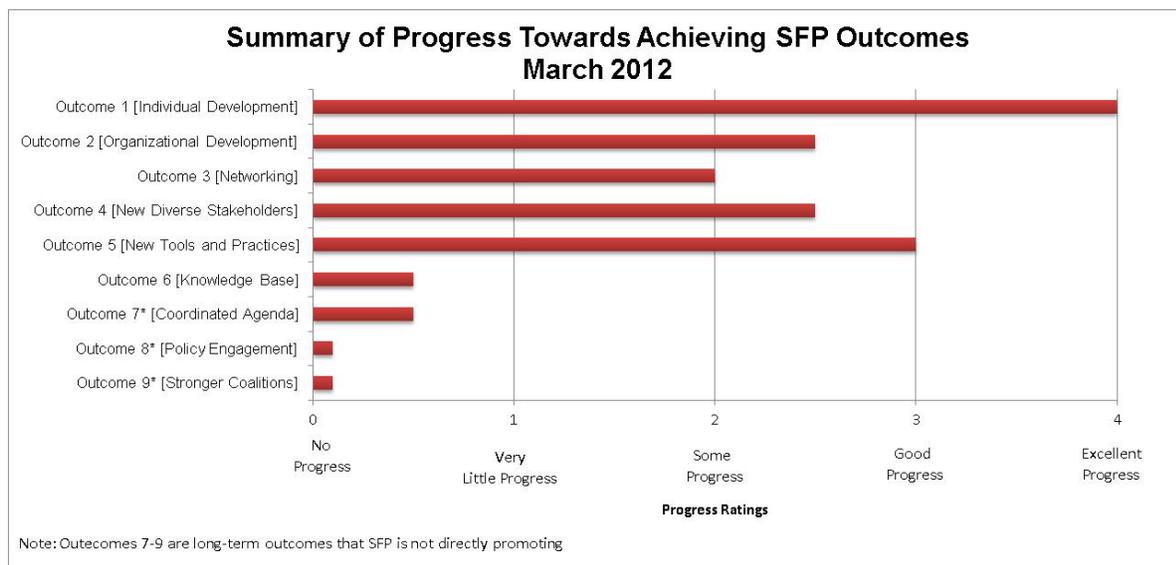
"Progress" is defined as follows:

Excellent Progress: strategies clearly map to outcomes, substantial evidence on progress from multiple sources;
Good Progress: strategies evident, good evidence from several sources on progress;
Some Progress: strategies in place, but not fully implemented, some evidence to cite;
Very Little Progress: strategies somewhat unclear or not well implemented, few examples to cite;
No Progress: strategies not at all evident, repeated comments expressed on lack of progress.

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Outcome 1 Findings: *Increases in individual skills in management and leadership*

As the primary contributor to this outcome, LDP aims to improve the leadership capacity of current and emerging leaders in the DV field. The table below summarizes the progress made toward Outcome 1 by LDP, OSG & NB/KS.

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LDP Outcomes

- **Increased self-awareness and self-management for sustainable leadership**. At least 90% of LDP alumni reported substantial progress in this area through their engagement in a variety of assessment tools (e.g., StrengthsFinder) to build awareness of their capabilities and potential. This new level of self-awareness has become the foundation for their openness to learn new skills, take risks, and try on new roles in their organizations and the field.

- **Increased understanding and valuing of collaborative partnerships, innovative service delivery and sustainable organizations**. Eighty percent of LDP alumni have taken on leadership roles in local, regional, and statewide leadership networks (e.g., LDP Cohort 1 participants joined the Partnership board).

- **Membership in effective peer learning networks, with strong connections to sustain self and organization**. The common experience of going through LDP in a safe, trusting *and* challenging learning space has created relationships among cohort members that are lasting well beyond the formal program. These connections are breaking their sense of isolation and infusing new ideas and resources into their organizations.

- **Increased understanding of multicultural and strength-based frameworks to express commitment to mission**. Both the multicultural and strength-based frameworks have powerfully transformed how a number of cohort members understand themselves, their relationship to others, and how they carry out their work to achieve their organizational mission.

- **Sustainable, reflective, and adaptive practices used to successfully manage and lead**. Cohort members report engaging in self-care practices that make them better as collaborative and adaptive leaders and coaches, and help them address issues of burnout and work/life balance.

- **New and stronger skills in areas of people and program management, strategic thinking, financial and resource management, data-driven decision-making, relationship management, communications and marketing**. While half of the Cohort 1 members reported that they are still working on their IDP goals to develop their skills, 100% of LDP alumni expressed an increased level of confidence in their leadership skills and are applying tools and frameworks to better manage their staff and organizations in strategic and effective ways.

- **OSG grantees are reporting individual-level skill and knowledge gains** such as the following: increased knowledge about fund development, financial management, and grant/contract management; improved supervisory skills; improved ability to think organizationally and strategically; heightened levels of confidence among organizational leaders; and new skills as a collaborative leader and coordinator.

- **Among those who attended NB/KS webinars and Regional Institutes (RIs), more than half said that the webinars were extremely or very helpful in increasing their leadership or management skills.** Among the participants in the RIs on strategic communication, 80% reported that the training was "very" or "somewhat" effective in increasing their management and leadership skills. Additionally, 91% of participants of the RIs on grassroots fundraising reported that the training was "very" or "somewhat" effective in increasing their time management skills.

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Outcome 2 Findings: Measurable improvements in organizational strength

As the primary contributor to this outcome, OSG aims to realize measurable improvements in organizational strength. While OSG project implementation efforts have resulted in various stages and manifestations of increased organizational strength, full evidence of *measurable* increases is still forthcoming. The table below summarizes progress made to date by OSG towards measurable improvements in organizational strength, as well as LDP contributions.

- **Among the eight (of 15) OSG grantees that have taken both rounds of the CCAT, the average gain in technical capacity score was 19.** For the other key capacity areas (adaptive, leadership, management, and organizational culture), there have been small average declines in scores. However, caution must be used in interpreting these results as scores for seven of the OSG grantees were not yet available. Furthermore, CCAT scores represent snapshots in time of organizational capacity, and a decline (or increase) in capacity scores may say less about the success of the OSG project (and the specific capacity it is targeting), and more about other contextual factors with which a grantee organization is contending, or the fact that different staff may be taking the CCAT during the second round. Finally, the CCAT does not fully capture the progress toward organizational strengthening that is represented by the tools, practices and models being developed by OSG grantees.

- **Almost one-third of LDP participants reported that there has been a high level of organizational change as a result of their participation.** (*All* participants reported that there has been a medium to high level of organizational change as a result of their participation.) The majority of participants reported that their organizations are approaching the use of data, staffing structures, collaborative development, and/or fundraising/financial management in new ways as a result of LDP.

- **Less LDP progress has been made with regard to furthering the connection between multicultural development and organizational effectiveness**. Only two participants are undertaking projects in this area through collaborations with local Native American tribes.

- **Post-LDP, nine participant organizations had succession plans in place.** This compares favorably to the four participant organizations that had such plans in place prior to LDP.

- **Three-quarters of LDP participants made progress toward establishing a system of effective leadership, management, and accountability.** Progress was most notable in the areas of staff development and management, and improved decision making and problem solving.

Outcome 5 Findings: Creative and effective tools, practices, models and collaborations to address domestic violence

OSG is the primary contributor to this outcome. The tools, practices, models and collaborations to address domestic violence can be thought of as the *vehicles* by which OSG grantees are working to bolster their organizational strength in the broad areas of: regional and collaborative-based efforts; shared leadership models and organizational transition; technology, data systems, and communications; and staff development and volunteer programs. While OSG grantees developed organizational strengthening vehicles specifically for the SFP and for particular organizational needs, the LDP and NB/KS components generally adapted pre-existing tools, frameworks, and trainings—a number of which received positive feedback by participants. The table below summarizes progress made by all three components towards Outcome 5.

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- **With regard to organizational models and structures, OSG grantees showed evidence of comprehensive transformative models as well as more discrete ones.** Examples of the former include new iterations of shared leadership models as well as models that integrate new service areas or disciplines. Such comprehensive models have profound implications for all aspects of the organization, while the more discrete models focus on a particular aspect of structure, such as volunteer support.

- **With regard to organizational and data systems, three OSG grantees implemented new systems that raised critical questions about the organization's role and priorities, as well as the value of ongoing data collection.** These systems included performance management systems as well as an online information and referral system. Other grantees were concerned with revamping existing systems, such as those concerned with online donations and staff management.

- **With regard to policies, plans and processes, grantees developed detailed processes to support new collalboratives; developed and implemented larger strategic and communications plans; and revised processes meant to streamline client and work flows.**

- **With regard to products and purchases, grantees developed perhaps some of the more transferable resources.** At the product level, it is easier to see the transferability of resources from OSG grantees to the broader DV field. For example, the Volunteer Excellence Program Toolkit is a product that was designed with an original and explicit intention to transfer the model to at least four other DV organizations. Other transferable products include manuals and media campaign materials.

- **While three of the OSG grant projects centered on developing partnerships and collaboratives, other OSG grantees varied in the extent and depth of their partnership development.** Categories of new partners included ambassador partners used to help conduct outreach, learning partners used to inform project direction, and funder partners to further support organizational development. OSG grantees also developed social service partnerships and cultivated less traditional allies (such as prisoner reentry networks).

- **LDP effectively adapted and used a number of tools for organizational strengthening purposes.** These tools included StrengthsFinder, the Multicultural Framework/Privilege Pie, the Double Bottom Line Matrix, and Peer Coaching Circles.

- **Though not developed within the SFP, a number of tools and practices were shared with SFP participants through webinars and Regional Institutes.** These included message distribution, communications campaign, and grassroots fundraising tools that can help bolster organizational strength.

Findings for:

- ***Outcome 3, 4, 6: Stronger DV networks and field capacity to network and collaborate to promote peer learning and share best practices; a rich and relevant knowledge base useful to the DV field; and New diverse individual and organizational stakeholders engaged with DV organizations.***

As a primary contributor to these outcomes, NB/KS aims to improve networking and knowledge sharing among DV leaders and practitioners by providing them with the opportunities to connect and exchange ideas. Engagement of diverse leaders, who have traditionally been underrepresented in the DV field, is especially welcome in these networking and knowledge-sharing efforts. NB/KS intends to sustain the knowledge generated by storing it in a repository available to the entire field. Following is a summary of progress on Outcomes 3, 4, and 6.

- **Participant feedback indicates that NB/KS events, such as webinars and Regional and Statewide Institutes, were highly successful at providing a forum for DV leaders to connect and share best practices.** Twenty-three out of 40 survey respondents said that the webinar format was an "excellent" or "very good" way to "build a stronger network of peers to share practices." Participant feedback for all six of the RIs also show that 57% of respondents thought that the events were an "excellent" opportunity to network with peers, while 36% found it a "very good" chance to network with peers.

- **These events were also successful in engaging diverse, emerging leaders.** Among those who attended the webinars, 93% were non-ED, 52% were people of color, 43% had fewer than 3 years of experience, and 41% served rural areas.

- **Even though networking occurred at the events, very few interviewees stated that they made *new* connections that lasted beyond the day.** This may be a partial function of interviewees already having many solid connections with their peers.

- **For OSG grantees, the convenings facilitated networking and knowledge sharing between grantees**. As a result of the November 2011 convening, for example, 65% of grantees gained a much stronger understanding of how to share the lessons from the OSG to the broader field; 94% of grantees gained a much stronger understanding of each other's projects through the convening; and nearly all the grantees intended to bring some of the lessons learned back to their own organization.

- **At least one-third of OSG grantees formed new networks or partnerships with local agencies through their projects.** At least two of these partners were non-traditional stakeholders such as local prisoner re-entry networks or housing collaboratives.

- **For the LDP, networking and knowledge sharing was extensive and substantial within Cohort 1.** This is due to the intensity of the 18-month experience and also to the depth of trust that was created within this cohort of 20 individuals. As an example of the strength of their relationships, nearly all the Cohort 1 participants regularly interact with each other on Facebook and have continued to participate in peer-coaching conference calls after the completion of their participation in the LDP.

- **For the LDP, changes to the recruitment process resulted in a sharp rise in overall diversity of the applicant pool and cohort.** Most notably, the LDP has gone from being a majority white, ED program in Cohort 1 to a group composed primarily of non-ED, leaders of color in Cohort 2.

Findings for:

- *Outcome 7, 8, 9: Increased skills, knowledge & spaces to develop a coordinated and shared agenda to prevent/end DV; and increased engagement by state and local leadership to shape and advance a coordinated DV policy advocacy agenda; and strengthened statewide and local coalitions to network, support, and sustain the DV field in CA.[1]*

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[1] The SFP Coordinating Committee revised the logic model so that Outcomes 7-9 are considered "long-term" outcomes, and that SFP would contribute to the extent that it could. However, the expectation is less on the CC members driving these outcomes, and more on supporting SFP participants to drive progress towards these.

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Feedback from the latest round of interviews confirmed that relatively little progress has been accomplished to date toward these three outcomes. Some key themes include.

- **Some confusion exists on how SFP could be set up to contribute more effectively to Outcomes 7 and 8.** Feedback suggests that while relevant resources and expertise exist on the Coordinating Committee, they are currently not capitalized on by the SFP.

- **With regard Outcome 7, 90% of interviewees agreed that the LDP has built the skills and confidence to help leaders step up to statewide, field-level leadership roles.**

- **The application of a strengths-based framework as a primary prevention tool is particularly promising approach that emerged from the LDP to develop a shared and coordinated agenda.**

- **While SFP participants and the Advisory Group see a clear role for the Partnership within SFP and beyond, others expressed concerns about a leadership and programmatic void.**

- **An engaged cohort of LDP alumni are interested and ready to help craft a shared and coordinated agenda.**

- **No direct SFP strategies have been devoted to Outcome 9 to date.**

Recommendations

Based on our assessment of SFP strategy implementation and the extent to which knowledge is being gathered and shared across the SFP and the broader DV field, we offer key recommendations in the following categories: (1) strategy-specific implementation; (2) building critical mass: sustaining leadership momentum; (3) knowledge sharing for field-level learning; (4) cross-component coordination and content integration; and (5) continued attention to engagement of diverse stakeholders; and (6) project-level coordination and partnerships. These recommendations can be found in full in the last chapter of the report.

Strategy-Specific Implementation

— *Consider depth vs. breadth of exposure to LDP training content.*

— *Assist LDP training participants who are not executive directors (EDs) in translating content.*

— *Develop further thinking on how the SFP regional institutes may have value-added for middle- or junior-level or non-ED staff.*

— *Be mindful that the organizational strengthening process can be like a can of worms (or a series of opportunities).*

— *Interpret the CCAT evaluation results with some caveats in mind.*

— *Support field-initiated experimentation and testing of OSG models for field learning.*

Building Critical Mass: Sustaining Leadership Momentum

— *Harness the energy and momentum created by an energized and transformed LDP cohort of leaders.*

— *Apply the network movement leadership framework to further build trust and engage diverse*

voices in ongoing field level conversations and agenda setting.

Knowledge Sharing for Field-Level Learning

— *Be mindful that knowledge acquired today may not be applied until much later when there is a potential use.*

— *Invite grantees to share and take action when the Coordinating Committee is ready to use their knowledge and materials.*

— *Create opportunities for more in-depth exchanges about the LDP and OSG components.*

— *Transfer knowledge from grantees to broader DV field.*

— *Replicate or adapt some of the effective LDP training components for broader training/dissemination at RIs.*

— *Develop case studies of lessons learned from LDP and OSG Cohort 1.*

— *Seek and apply lessons from other programs, initiatives, and fields.*

Cross-Component Coordination and Content Integration

— *Devote more strategic thinking to improve content integration within the SFP.*

— *Articulate clearer expectations for cross-component integration.*

— *Re-think expectations (and potentially application guidelines) for OSG-LDP overlap.*

— *Consider what would be required to contribute to Outcomes 7 and 8 if there is interest within SFP (increased skills, knowledge and spaces to develop coordinated & shared agenda; and increased engagement by state and local leadership to shape and advance a coordinated DV policy advocacy agenda).*

Engagement of Diverse Stakeholders

— *Develop intentional strategies to engage new and diverse stakeholders with and within DV organizations.*

— *Be mindful of the uneven racial/ethnic representation within cohort membership.*

— *Develop more comprehensive and consistent tracking of demographic data at SFP events.*

Project-Level Coordination and Partnerships

— *Continued focus on building a stronger working relationship among CC Partners.*

In conclusion, only two years into implementation, the SFP has created transformative professional and life experiences for field leaders, and powerful stories of organizational change. The potential is great for SFP to leave a legacy for the field when the project sunsets in two years. The LDP and OSG in particular are ripe for sharing valuable tools, knowledge and practices with the DV field. The SFP Institute, Regional Institutes, and other DV conferences are critical vehicles for making this sharing possible.

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In 2012, SPR looks forward to contributing to the knowledge sharing by conducting case studies of effective LDP leaders and OSG projects, and by the ongoing evaluation of all three components. We look forward to continuing to learn together to ensure that the SFP most effectively serves the DV field.