



## Community Learning Exchange Update



**Community Learning Exchange Update  
April 2009**

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contributed to this report.*

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### INTRODUCTION

Cultivating collective leadership that can work across boundaries for community change is critical work of our times. Approaches to developing collective leadership are springing up in a wide range of communities that are often unaware of each other. How can innovations that occur in a particular location spread? How can promising developments be brought to scale to increase the impact? The Berkana Institute highlights the importance of *translocal* learning to connect community leaders beyond the borders of their communities or countries. The Harwood Institute proposes connecting pockets of innovation as a critical community building capacity. The Center for Ethical Leadership and their partner communities, with support from the W.K. Kellogg Foundation, help communities break the isolation and share their community wisdom through the Community Learning Exchange (CLE).

The CLE promotes the use of collective, place-based leadership by affirming the wisdom and capacity of local communities to solve 21<sup>st</sup> Century challenges. Unlike conventional learning institutes, grounded in traditional pedagogy delivered by credentialed experts, the CLE views communities, people, and their experiences as the new “instructors and texts” for learning. Community change agents share stories of change (actions, practices, ideas and outcomes) with one another in environments that respect and value local wisdom. Leaders reach across traditional boundaries to identify new, emerging, or marginalized leaders and include them in community building and problem-solving activities. A wide variety of teams, from communities across the United States, converge in a location where cultural pride, boundary crossing and a sense of place have resulted in significant social change.

*We rely on the Community Learning Exchange to provide us with perspective on what we can do. We have deepened and clarified our work by being here.”*

— Marianna Gaston, assistant principal, Brooklyn, N.Y.

### HOSTING THE CLE

Community Learning Exchanges have been held in the borderlands of South Texas, in immigrant communities near Boston and in two New Mexico pueblo communities:

- **May 15-18, 2008. Hosted by Llano Grande Center for Research and Community Development in Edcouch/Elsa, Texas.** This Exchange highlighted how Llano Grande uses youth adult partnerships and digital storytelling to effect change in teaching and learning. Participants learned about process of telling story, analyzing story and constructing new stories to bring about change.

Featured local projects included high school students working to persuade elected officials to clean up a toxic site in the middle of a residential area, a community group overseeing construction of new schools after passing a multi-million-dollar bond issue, and community-school partnerships in surrounding communities.

- **November 6-9, 2008. Hosted by Roca in Chelsea, Massachusetts.** This Exchange showcased how Roca’s Immigrant and Refugee Initiative (RIRI) has organized, partnered and mobilized young people and adults in the community around immigration, advocacy and policy. Participants learned how to strengthen youth and adult partnerships and to use the peacemaking circles process to promote collective leadership among community change agents. They also used the arts to build relationships and engagement. The Chelsea CLE spotlighted Roca’s “Know Your Rights” campaign to help undocumented residents during a season of aggressive immigration enforcement raids that were splitting many families and communities.
- **March 17-20, 2009. Hosted by the Laguna Department of Education in Albuquerque, New Mexico.** This Exchange illuminated how the Laguna and Acoma pueblos have used storytelling to claim and maintain core identity through centuries of outside influence. The power of language, history and the culture of place were presented as a source of collective identity and grounding for moving forward in the 21<sup>st</sup> century – particularly through education in the schools. CLE participants experienced the spirit of Acoma culture while visiting ancient Sky City and the deep hospitality and generosity of the Laguna Pueblo during the feast day of St. Joseph. A strong theme was the importance of working across the generations to engage youth, adults and elders in partnership.

*“The CLE is about sharing that sense of power, knowing that there are other people out there fighting the same fight. Different places, different tweaks, but we are all in it with our hearts and with our passions. It is the power of knowing that at any time we could call or email and there is someone who will be there with you.”*

*— Lisa Dyea, a Pueblo of Laguna middle school educator*

### **WHO COMES TO THE CLE?**

The CLE has a local, regional and national character. More than 120 people have participated in the first three exchanges. CLEs provide an opportunity for groups working on critical issues to solidify their partnerships with the host agency. These local and regional partners represent a wide range of organizations: advocacy groups, schools, local foundations, technical assistance providers and community based organizations. In

Chelsea, participants included the Massachusetts Immigrant and Refugee Advocacy group, Boston Foundation and Northeast Action. In South Texas, the Foundation for Rural Trusts participated, and in Albuquerque, the New Mexico Community Foundation and Allies group attended.

Community teams have come from across the nation seeking to advance their work on building collective leadership for community change or to make progress on the specific issue being addressed by the learning exchange. Participants have come from the Bronx and Brooklyn, New York; Hawaii; Seattle, Washington; and South Texas.

For instance, Public School 24 in Brooklyn sent a team of teachers, principals, school board members and parents to accelerate their work to involve parents in this heavily immigrant community. A school district in south Texas sent teachers, administrators and students working on building relationships between the schools and community members. A university in Hawaii sent a team to work on approaches for implementing indigenous wisdom in community change. Coming as a team amplifies the learning and strengthens the implementation of new knowledge into action back home. This strategy also provides the opportunity for continuous conversation and support for ideas, and each other as the team works to implement their ideas.

KLCC communities have sent teams — often including new local partners — as a way to deepen and sustain their work and orient new folks into the collective leadership for community change model. KLCC teams have come from Boston, Colorado, Minnesota, New Mexico, New York, Texas, West Virginia, and Wisconsin.

*“A lot of times we get caught up in the job. I appreciate having the time and the gracious space to talk, and to talk freely.”*  
— Dana Fernandez, P.S. 24 business manager

## CORE CONCEPTS

The CLE offers a highly interactive exchange of learning with 35 to 50 participants over three days. The host team highlights the local work and provides a learning design to address a number of core concepts that are important to the work of collective leadership for community change. These concepts are incorporated into each exchange:

- **Creating Gracious Space.** This core text describes how to build trusting relationships and space for challenging conversations that move communities forward.
- **Collective Leadership.** The Framework Workbook, developed in KLCC, is a core text to illuminate the phases of leadership for change and the elements essential to this process.
- **Place-based Leadership.** How does the culture, history, and story of this place and context influence local leadership approaches?

- **Crossing boundaries.** What boundaries are being crossed and what capacities are required for success?
- **Individual Leadership.** What personal transformations build the capacity of the community?
- **Community Change.** What is the change work the local community has selected as critical?

Participant teams describe their community change projects, receive input from other participants, and develop plans for next steps at home. An underlying question throughout the learning exchange is: *How do you make explicit and develop the skills that create collective leadership capacity in communities?*

### UPCOMING LEARNING EXCHANGES / WHAT'S NEXT?

Two more learning exchanges are scheduled for 2009:

- **Aug. 6-9, 2009:** Buffalo, New York. The session will examine ways of engaging newer immigrants and longtime residents in fighting structural racism and building a movement of economic opportunity.
- **Oct. 21-24, 2009:** Minnesota and Wisconsin will host a CLE focused on educational equity in rural and urban schools.

The CLE is developing plans for learning exchanges in 2010 and beyond. Some of the ideas under consideration include:

- Combining place-based and indigenous approaches in Hawaii. How culture, language, and place can inform land use, food systems, sustainability and education in the 21<sup>st</sup> century.
- Offering a series of CLE's on the role of racial equity and reconciliation in community change work. This could feature various perspectives most prominent in different places within the United States such as: Native American, Latino immigrant and African American.
- Bringing successful approaches to Latino and immigrant education to emerging efforts in Kansas.

### CLE Impact

The impact of the CLE happens on a number of levels. Participants experience personal transformation, are better equipped to impact their institutions and are often inspired to address the policies that need to be discussed, challenged, or changed. We're finding that the experience of hosting the CLE also builds the capacity of the host agency.

The following pages offer four stories of impact:

- Individual transformation at the CLE in New Mexico
- Brooklyn educators meet Llano Grande and the CLE

- Texas teachers at the CLE (in Texas and Massachusetts)
- Hosting the CLE in Chelsea, Massachusetts

## **INDIVIDUAL TRANSFORMATION AT THE CLE IN NEW MEXICO**

Written by Dale Nienow

How do you like your high school? I asked in an attempt to get to know one of the students at our gathering. Joseph responded succinctly, “It sucks.” Accepting his answer (without inquiring about his reasons) I went on to meet some of the other people in the group. Intergenerational teams from across the United States were gathering in New Mexico to explore the power of storytelling in cultivating community change. Jodi Burshia, an English teacher at Laguna-Acoma high school, brought some of her students, including Joseph, to the CLE at the invitation of our hosts, the Pueblo of Laguna Department of Education.

During the first evening of this three-day gathering, we heard stories from some of the community members who had worked together to build the new Laguna Acoma high school. They shared their dream of building a high school that would bring together the two land grant Hispanic communities and two Native American Pueblo communities that had lived so separately from each other for hundreds of years. The public high school was an opportunity to show youth and parents in eastern Cibola County that they warranted as much public support as the wealthier citizens of the western part of the county. Joseph listened quietly.

The next day, the group of 45 participants traveled to the ancient Sky City, home to members of the Acoma nation for more than 1,000 years. The stories recounted how the Acoma adapted to the colonialization of Europeans and managed to maintain their culture, language and religion. We shared our personal stories of family, identity and community at the foot of the mesa upon which Sky City was built. We constructed maps of our life’s journey and built greater trust and relationships among the participants. During one of the breaks, Francisco Guajardo, a professor and community developer from south Texas asked Joseph, “tell me about your school.” Joseph described the different learning experiences he was having. He reported that “school has been mostly positive.”

That evening after dinner, we had an “open mic night” where members of the gathering could share songs, poetry and dance, expressing themselves creatively. Joseph was hesitant to come as he and his friends thought that “poetry was for sissies.” Our host, Lee Francis, offered several poems performed in the slam style of poetic delivery, which emphasizes animated, dramatic performance as part of the expression. Closer to rap performances than a traditional reading of poetry, poetry slams have great appeal to youth.

The next day, groups continued to share their stories of identity and dreams for themselves and their communities. Joseph, who had been engaging intently in the

gathering for two and half days, shared that he would like to become a better writer so he could tell stories like the ones he heard at the poetry slam.

What helped this young man from the Laguna Pueblo go from “school sucks” to “I want to be a better writer” in less than three days? As Jodi, Francisco and I recounted Joseph’s journey, it was clear that he was a bright, talented young man whose first statement revealed that the school had not provided a good platform to express his dreams and imagination. The CLE provided a structure that supported the sharing of personal stories and perspectives, and listening deeply to others. Immersed in this environment, Joseph found a way to express his ideas for his life.

During the closing circle for this conference, Francisco told the story of Tolstoy, the great Russian writer. After years of success telling his stories to the world, Tolstoy became interested in education and went to work in a school for peasants. He was dismayed at what he found. The schools focused on the basics — reading, writing and arithmetic — but the students couldn’t do what Tolstoy had spent his life doing. There was no place for the “peasants to tell their stories.”

This same story continues today. There are too few places for average citizens to tell their stories — not in the schools, not in the community. The CLE provides a platform for sharing stories and access to the conversations that can transform individual lives and communities. Within the many untold stories of our citizens, lie the talent and wisdom we need most. These gifts are ready to be offered if, as Joseph shows us, we are willing to help each other release our imaginations and inner dreams.

### **BROOKLYN EDUCATORS MEET LLANO GRANDE AND THE CLE**

Written by Francisco & Miguel Guajardo

When Tamara Estrella, Dana Fernandez and Mariana Gaston traveled to South Texas for the inaugural CLE in May 2008, they told a story of their school: Public School 24 Dual Language School for International Studies in Brooklyn, New York. They narrated the history of P.S. 24’s parental involvement program, which had experienced deep challenges in a school where 93 percent of the students are Latino, but where many Latino parents felt they don’t fit in because of racial and/or language differences between them, the leaders of the program and the culture of the institution. As school employees, the three women understood that changes had to be made to their parental involvement program, and they determined to develop a strategic plan to do that.

A mix of youth from a local high school who worked closely with the CLE host organization, the Llano Grande Center, took part in all phases of the gathering. As guests enjoyed the pleasant weather, they also got a sense for the diverse quality of the South Texas borderlands. The CLE group traversed into Mexico for dinner the night they arrived. Stories, both personal and organizational, guided the style and substance of the learning exchange.

## **The Engagement Process**

The process for engagement at this inaugural CLE followed a model Myles Horton employed at the Highlander Center in Tennessee beginning in the 1930s as he hosted inter-racial groups to talk about issues of labor, social justice and civil rights. Horton used a popular education strategy to bring people together to change each other and their communities. The Horton model was augmented by collective leadership principles. The process called for participants to tell their community stories to the group; a deep analysis of the stories followed; and the subsequent step called for participants to develop a plan of action for community change based on what people learned from each other's stories. As the CLE used this protocol, the P.S. 24 representatives thought carefully about the story of their parental involvement work.

“Getting families involved is a challenge,” said Tamara who works as a parent coordinator at the Brooklyn school. “A lot of immigrant parents think that the fact that their children are getting an education is enough ... and many immigrant parents are scared because of their legal status,” she said. Founded in the mid 1990s, P.S. 24 intended from the beginning to create the space for parents and families to become involved in their children's schooling. The school experienced only partial success in its first decade of operation, but Tamara and others felt that thoughtful, strategic planning would strengthen the program.

P.S. 24's collective story was provocative. Before they shared their story, they worked to outline a clear sense of purpose. They asked tough questions of each other and reminded themselves of the importance of the Parent Association (PA) at their school and of the challenges that many immigrant parents found in connecting with the Association. When P.S. 24 shared their story at the CLE, it became apparent that members from P.S. 24 had different views about why their Parent's Association work was not more effective. As they presented to group, they described the power dynamics at the school and within the PA as critical issues that had to be addressed.

## **Experiencing Gracious Space**

*Gracious Space*, a book by Pat Hughes, was required reading in preparation for the Texas CLE. Gracious space is also a practice created when, as one CLE participant said, “There is authentic and transparent conversation shared between those in a physical space.” The P.S. 24 presentation encouraged a spirited discussion on their parental involvement program and consequently demonstrated several important developments:

- 1) P.S. 24's staff felt that they finally had the opportunity to focus on improving their program without being governed by the daily interruptions of school life;
- 2) The staff profited from a group of critical friends who posed hard questions that challenged them to think differently about parental involvement work; and
- 3) The staff was encouraged and invited to examine the nuances embedded in their stories and their work.

*Gracious space* invited participants to share ideas, emotions and questions that propelled action. As one member of the P.S. 24 team said, “this space provoked heated discussions

that need to happen. These conversations are especially about trust and vulnerability ... which is really about saying what is on people's mind." At the core of the CLE climate is *gracious space*, which is fundamentally about prompting people to tell their stories in sincere, fresh and bold ways, and to do this in an environment guided by deep hospitality.

### **Analyzing the Stories**

The power of story was central to the social engagement in the South Texas CLE. The opportunity for analyzing and providing feedback to collective stories was taken by applying what Horton referred to as the "critical eye" to the different stories. As P.S. 24 reflected on the questions posed, they also described the tensions they had to work through together both in responding to the questions, but also as they worked on building trust within their own team. "Trust," said one P.S. 24 team member "is something we clearly need to build on our campus in Brooklyn."

The space created to deconstruct each community's stories and weave them into a shared national story was facilitated in a very public process. The members of P.S. 24 then turned a critical eye on their community's story. The team looked at the parent issue through the multiple lenses of teachers, school leaders, parents and other community members. The opportunity to look critically at these stories created the space for honest, challenging and courageous conversations.

### **Action Planning**

The P.S. 24 team gained greater clarity about their work and strategies during the CLE. They left South Texas with stronger personal and working relationships, a more informed sense of purpose and a set of skills to apply in their community work. Together they generated an action plan focused on documenting the stories of students, parents and others in the community, and they learned how to build on people's stories to co-construct a climate and culture of engagement in their school. Once back in Brooklyn, they began implementing their new skill set over the course of the summer.

### **Continuing the Learning**

In November 2008, the P.S. 24 team traveled to Chelsea, Massachusetts, to take part in the second CLE hosted by Roca. During an early sharing session, the P.S. 24 team pulled out a manuscript their team had published on parents' stories. The team took the lessons learned from the initial CLE and applied them to the change process in their home community. Through that, they set the wheels of change in motion. The Parent Association at P.S. 24 grew from 25 parents in the spring of 2008 to more than 50 parents by November of the same year.

As the P.S. 24 team implemented the plan of action in their community, their work became transformed and expanded as more parents engaged in the conversation and storytelling process. The process has proven powerful in building trust and fostering change in their Brooklyn school and community. The P.S. 24 team also became a leader in shaping the learning experience at the Chelsea CLE. The ROCA convening expanded the skill set for P.S. 24, but the group also made valuable contributions to the learning exchange. P.S. 24 was important for several reasons:

- 1) they contributed to the historical memory of the CLE experience,
- 2) they reminded us of the need to connect the work and learning experience to place, and
- 3) their participation contributed to the story of impact the CLE can have in communities as they share their story of growth of their community.

The engagement and growth of P.S. 24 highlights the impact of the CLE and KLCC work beyond the first two KLCC sessions. As the CLE community continues to grow, we also see the power of collective leadership and the broader CLE.

The P.S. 24 team and other CLE participants have identified the following lessons learned as an important contribution to the learning at the initial CLE exchange. The following language comes directly from one of several evaluative sources documented through video and written form during the Chelsea learning exchange:

- Making learning fun is important to collective leadership;
- Build trust and relationships;
- Use the critical eye on our own stories of our work;
- Experiential learning is important;
- Create time and space to talk openly and honestly;
- Use the learning skills and ideas to name old constructs;
- Rejuvenate the power of hope; and
- Gracious space is important to collective leadership work.

### **TEXAS TEACHERS AT THE CLE**

Written by Francisco & Miguel Guajardo

About a dozen South Texas schoolteachers participated in the inaugural CLE, hosted in South Texas. The host organization, the Llano Grande Center, facilitated the process for engagement, which they borrowed from the practices of the Tennessee based Highlander Center, the historic popular education and leadership development organization (*see the CLE P.S. 24 case study for more details*). The process called for participants to: 1) share stories about their communities and their work, 2) analyze the stories through a collaborative process, and 3) work with others to develop plans of action for how their stories could translate into positive community change. The teachers participated in every part of the intensive process.

The local teachers came from school districts across the region and all had one thing in common: they were interested in knowing how to become engaged as leaders and catalysts for change in their schools and their communities. By the end of the learning exchange, the teachers felt ready to pursue a range of action projects, which they developed and vetted with the other CLE participants. One group prepared an action plan focused on how to involve parents in the life of the school; another group developed a

strategy focused on changing their school culture; and a third group planned on how they could engage policy issues as the next legislative session met at the turn of the year.

As the Texas teachers gained confidence in their work as civically engaged citizens, they also encouraged some of their teacher friends to consider attending the second CLE in Boston. A teacher from the first CLE wrote in her evaluation, “I learned a lot from the first learning exchange. I will definitely share what I learned with others.”

She apparently did more than share; she also inspired other teachers to take part in future CLEs. In November 2008, three South Texas teachers pursued that inspiration as they traveled to Chelsea, Massachusetts, to participate in the second exchange hosted by Roca, an organization that works to empower Boston-area youth. One teacher, Mark, works at a South Texas middle school and has been involved, albeit marginally, in a few of the change efforts at his school. A second teacher, Ana Laura, is a Spanish instructor in a rural middle school, and the third teacher, Santos, teaches math at another middle school along the Texas-Mexico border.

As a teenager, Mark traveled to several places across the country as a Llano Grande student intern to either present or to simply participate in youth leadership and community development conferences. His flight to Boston was not the first time he had flown.

For Ana Laura and Santos, on the other hand, flying to Boston was a novel experience. Admittedly, their range of life experiences had been reasonably confined to the boundaries of the Rio Grande Valley of South Texas. Santos had sojourned to northern states as a migrant farm worker as a youth. Her recollections of those travels, however, were limited. “I just worked in the fields and stayed with my family most of the time,” she said.

Anna Laura spent a little time in Houston, but claims the Rio Grande Valley and northern Mexico as the places where she’s spent the preponderance of her time. “I haven’t really been out, so Boston will be a very new experience,” she said shortly before the trip. Flying and meeting people from different parts of the country were new experiences for these South Texas teachers, as was immersing themselves in the work of the CLE and the practices of Roca.

The Boston CLE mirrored the identity of its host organization, Roca, where the Circle is a signature process for social engagement. Since the organization learned the Circle technique and process from the Tagish-Tlingit Nation from the Yukon Territories, Roca has embedded the practice into its programming across the organization.

Circle is a simple, yet powerful process defined as “as an alternative process to the traditional hierarchy style of running meetings and getting business done.” Circle is typically characterized by a commitment to the following: 1) neutralize power and equity, 2) build consensus, 3) forge a shared value system to achieve a common purpose or goal. Circle was also the most powerful skill and strategy participants said they had learned.

The South Texas teachers clearly benefited from learning the Circle strategy. “I first used it in the small group conversations,” said Anna Laura, “and it was powerful. Its respect for everyone’s voice is what I especially like about it.” Mark spoke about how he had used a version of Circle in his practice as a schoolteacher, but observing Roca facilitators implement it gave him access to new possibilities. “I can use this with my students, but I think it can be especially valuable with adults ... you know, with those adults who always want to dominate conversation.” Mark saw the strategy as useful to neutralize power dynamics with adults, whereas Santos claimed that she would use it to do project planning with her students. “I’m planning a college visitation trip with my students, and I think I’ll use the Circle process with my students and their parents to plan the trip.”

### **Bringing the Skills Back**

Mark’s school district has experienced financial and political turmoil during the past academic year. His rural South Texas community has unfortunately been victim to the vicissitudes of the national and global economic forces. The local economy is in what some characterize as a depression, and the school has functioned as this rural community’s chief employment agency for the past several generations. During the past few years, the school district dramatically over-hired auxiliary staff (bus drivers, cafeteria workers, security guards, janitors). This created a major financial crisis for the school district and led to the consequent demoralization at the respective campuses. Faculty and parent discontent abounded in the schools and community, and nobody really had a response regarding how to deal with it — until Mark returned from the Boston CLE.

Mark’s participation at the CLE had a clear impact. Upon his return to South Texas he became immersed in conversations about school leadership, school climate and community change. “Being introduced to the concept of collective leadership really gave me a different awareness,” he said, “and that helped me think differently about how to deal with the situation in my school district.”

Mark used the circle process as a means to build trust and build relationships. Though the outcome in the schools is undetermined, Mark’s transformation is clear. He is emerging as a leader who understands the value of collective leadership and is practicing the skills to do it well.

Santos and Anna Laura had a similarly transformative experience at the Boston CLE. Beyond the novelty of being in a different environment and meeting people from different walks of life, the collective leadership model also impressed the two teachers. “It’s harder to change things when you do it individually,” Santos said. To which, Anna Laura responded, “especially when you’re working in a school like mine, you need to do this with others; only then can you affect change.” Together, and with others, they have set out to change how their school district looks at the forces of change. They have also created a new approach to engage parents in the teaching and learning process — something they learned from their Brooklyn peers at the Boston CLE.

## **Lessons Learned**

The Roca CLE facilitated the transformation of individuals and communities; participants such as the South Texas teachers learned the invaluable skills of sharing, facilitating, and relationship building during the exchange. Through the evaluation process, the teachers shared a few of the lessons they learned:

- Breaking the social and geographic isolation is important;
- Relationship building and trust building are critical to collective action;
- Intergenerational sharing is powerful to the learning experience;
- Storytelling helped people learn about each other's experiences;
- Creating safe space for taking risks is important to the learning process;
- Building hope in people is critical to the change process; and
- Respecting the multiple ways of knowing, modes such as: cognitive, emotional, critical, and relational learning, help with the learning process.

## **ROCA'S EXPERIENCE AS A CLE HOST ORGANIZATION**

Written by Dale Nienow

Chelsea, Massachusetts has always been a community of immigrants, though the home countries change over time. Immigrants have come from Bosnia, Afghanistan, and Somalia. Currently, most residents come from Central America. Though Roca has worked with immigrants for a long time, in recent years the organization has moved more directly into immigrant education. Roca is renowned locally for its work helping young people avoid the lure of the streets — drugs, gangs, and prostitution. The organization has worked actively on reducing violence, helping youth stay in school and offering alternatives to the bad choices available on the streets.

Recent aggressive raids in the Boston area by the Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) have split many immigrant families and created a new level of fear among undocumented residents. Roca has embarked on an initiative to educate immigrants on their rights so they are prepared to follow the laws and not be manipulated or coerced into signing statements or sharing information not required when confronted by immigration agents. This outreach has trained more than 100 volunteer educators and reached more than 1,000 immigrants. Roca is also partnering with other agencies doing statewide work on policy and is connected to the governor's initiative to engage immigrants more fully into the civic life of the state.

The CLE came to Roca at an opportune time. To do this highly demanding work, the organization must deepen the efforts of veteran staff and cultivate emerging talent by bringing along young leaders and preparing them to step into critical positions. They also need to partner with other organizations rather than work alone or in competition with other groups that offer similar or complementary services.

Victor Jose Santana has long been affiliated with Roca, having grown up with the organization, moved away and returned. Now a senior agency leader, he is exceptionally

creative and talented in the art of relationship building. Leading the CLE provided Victor with a national stage to showcase his organization's work. His standing with partners was enhanced as they witnessed him perform so capably with teams from across the country.

Victor used the CLE as an opportunity to engage his co-worker, Roxannie DeJesus as co-leader of the exchange. Roxannie is a young, single mother, who joined the Roca staff after going through its youth programs. She has become masterful at "keeping Circles." The planning and hosting of the CLE deepened Roxannie's capacity to manage complex projects. She built confidence and gained experience in teaching others the approaches used by Roca. Having this successful experience will be useful as Roca relies more on her leadership.

Roca invited two of its partners to participate in the CLE: The Boston Foundation (a key Roca funder); and Northeast Action group (which provides training in organizing). They also included the Massachusetts Immigrant and Refugee Advocacy and the GED and ESL teachers they work with to participate in the CLE. In each case, the relationship with Roca was strengthened by the experience.

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**To view a short video** about the inaugural CLE (then titled *Community U*) visit:  
<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=TEVA-sY35ME>