

Building Community Leadership: from the
“Grassroots Up” and the “Inside Out”

Retia Scott Walker, PhD
Dean and Professor Emeritus,
Former COPC Director
University of Kentucky

Third Party Evaluator on the HOPEVI
Bluegrass Aspendale Revitalization Project,
The East End Community of Lexington, KY
Email: Rdswlk0@email.uky.edu

Paper presented at the 12th Annual Community Outreach Partnership Centers
(COPC) Conference, March 30, 2006, in Baltimore, MD

“Life’s most persistent and urgent question is: what are you doing for others?”

- Martin Luther King, Jr.

The CITIZEN LEADERSHIP ACADEMY (CLA) was a goal for the University of Kentucky COPC project. Residents in the East End community of Lexington (KY) were recruited for this 12-week class.

Three classes were offered, 12 weeks each, to nearly 60 participants. Forty-eight of them graduated from the CLA. At graduation, each individual received a Certificate from the University of Kentucky and a COPC Portfolio with pen and paper. Best of all, according to one graduate, “we received the education and networking experiences of a lifetime”.

CLA General Goal: to educate, enlighten, and empower community residents to be leaders and advocates.

Specific Goals were to:

- Develop and strengthen leadership capacity
- Promote grass-root advocacy that extends to political and policy influences
- Facilitate skill development in initiating and implementing social and structural changes in the community
- Forge connections between residents leaders and community-based resources
- Empower residents to identify an issue/project for which they would take personal responsibility in working to make a difference in the lives of others
- Incorporate a long-term vision of change with a commitment to accountability for strengthening their communities
- Encourage ‘each one to reach one’ in community development initiatives.

The CLA Curriculum

Session I: *Introduction and Overview*

Pre-assessment of participant's knowledge about grass roots leadership, advocacy and systems
Curriculum Overview
Expectations and Ground Rules
Challenges and Strategies for Empowering individuals and communities

Session II: *Creating Personal Power*

Personality and Leadership Styles
Self-esteem and Confidence
Power vs. Empowerment
Personal Power through Advocacy

Session III: **The Art of Leadership**

Leadership Roles and Styles
Shared responsibility and Teamwork
Collaboration and Consensus Building
Decision-making and Feedback
Communications
Conflict Resolution

Session IV: **Building Communities Based on Existing Assets**

Inventory of community assets and needs
Power of local associations and organizations
Building communities from the inside out: individuals and organization capacity
Spirituality of communities
Reflections and community mapping

Session V: **Getting to Know Your Community**

Census data, community surveys/assessments, and focus groups
Observations during neighborhood walks/tours
Histories, challenges, and current activities/issues

Session VI: **Strategic Planning**

Analysis of problems/issues
Identification of strategies for addressing problems
Goal setting and timelines
Teamwork and Collaborations
Project Planning Exercise

Session VII: **Grant Writing**

Grantsmanship processes
Sources of funding for community projects
Public Library Grant Writing Center (a resource)
Grant Application Exercise

Session VIII: **Effective Media Strategies and Presentation Skills**

Communications, presentations, media strategies
Media sources and resources
Relationship with the media
Use of visual aids to get messages across

Session IX: **Strategies for influencing public policies**

The political process
Local government at work (observe Work Sessions)
Roles of citizens and the political process
Simulation exercise at the LFUCG Chambers (role play Mayor and City Councilpersons)

Session X: **Lobby, Negotiate, and Maneuver on the Inside**

Identify key policy makers and people of power
The process of formal and informal lobbying
Build relationships and gain access
Know the issues and players
Lessons learned from experiences of community leaders

Session XI: **Building Community Wealth**

Value of education and economic development
Pool resources for community strengths
Programs and resources in the communities
Organize neighborhood associations
Post-assessment given to participants to assess whether the training has made a difference
Note: Grant applications are due tonight.

Session XII: **Where Do We Go From Here?**

Reflections on the CLA experience
Reports on individual/group grant proposals
Graduation Ceremony
Announcement of grant awards
Reception

Who were the CLA Participants?

- Residents in the East End community of Lexington, home of the COPC. However, after the first class, residents came from similar communities throughout the city.
- Participants were from diverse backgrounds, age groups, economic and educational levels. For example, there were 18 graduates in the first class (24 registered) ranging in ages 22-60+, two-thirds females, 70% African Americans, ninety percent employed, and educational levels ranged from some high school to associate degrees.

- Residents were recruited based on interest in the program. Some were nominated by COPC partners. After the first class, people began calling the COPC office to inquire about the program. CLA graduates also helped with recruitment.
- Some participants needed child care assistance during the program. COPC Community Outreach Specialists provided this service, when needed.

Commitment and Expectations:

- Attendance policies were established and make-up sessions offered. Criteria for graduation were established and enforced. Make-up sessions were offered twice for each class.
- Basic assumptions about the CLA and ground rules for classes and travel were discussed at the first class session.
- Participants gave authorization to use their photos and names in COPC publicity about the CLA.
- Self-profiles were written by participants for inclusion in the graduation programs.
- Each participant was expected to do a community project and compete for CLA funds to support the project. While they were encouraged to do group projects, individual ones were also acceptable.
- Collaboration, cooperation, community assets, and responsible actions were concepts emphasized throughout the sessions.

The CLA Team:

The Team consisted of COPC Director (Retia Walker), two UK graduate students (Scott Kelly and Tommie Robertson), and three COPC Partners: Ellen Parks, Director of the Phyllis Wheatley YWCA; David Cozart,

Community Involvement Director at LEXLINC; and Bruce Mundy, President of the East End Empowerment Board/Dir. BGA Teen Center. Jenny Laster, Grassroots Leadership Academy, served as a consultant on the Curriculum development.

The CLA Team was responsible for the following:

- Curriculum development/implementation/evaluation
- Recruitment
- Identification of and contact with speakers
- Coordination of class activities including graduation
- Identification of proposal reviewers for the mini-grants
- Off-site classes and transportation arrangements
- Decision making on grants awarded, oversight of the CLA projects/ budgets, mentoring and evaluation.
- Weekly meals and child care arrangements
- Facilitating each session

Who Delivered the CLA Program?

- The CLA Team coordinated the program. Speakers were identified and contacted prior to the beginning of each new class to confirm willingness and availability to give a lecture at the CLA. The goal was to introduce a diverse group of community/government- based leaders in Lexington who would share their relevant experiences on a given topic.
- Each week, two speakers were invited to lecture for 60-80 minutes on a specific topic based on their knowledge and experiences. A curriculum guide was sent to the speakers several weeks in advance so they could prepare their lectures with a focus on the objectives and expected outcomes outlined. Speakers included the Executive directors of the Lexington Housing Authority, the Urban League, Community Action Council, United Way, and Community Ventures; the Commissioner of Social Services; a popular local newspaper columnist, and editor of a community newspaper; and three City

Councilmen. Other speakers were grassroots leaders from Rochester (Shirley Edwards and Delanie Greene) and Detroit (Jim Emery).

- The classes met from 6-9pm, on Tuesdays for 12 weeks. During the 12th session, after reports on their projects were given, a graduation ceremony was held followed by a reception and photos of the graduates. Families, friends, partners and the community were invited. This event was always well attended and received excellent publicity.
- Each week, participants were given a ‘challenge’ related to the lesson of the day or the one for the following week. Reading assignments were also given each week.
- By the third session, each participant was given a three-ring binder with the entire curriculum including background reading materials, class exercises, pen, note pads, and a COPC bag. More materials were added each week. The Resource Book is the participant’s property for future use.

Role of COPC Partners:

Partners supported the CLA in the following ways:

- Recruited participants for the CLA classes
- Provided funds for the mini-grants, meals, and child care, when needed
- Provided transportation to off-site class meetings and for neighborhood tours
- Served as lecturers /speakers for classes/graduations
- Reviewed proposal applications for the mini-grants
- Provided meeting places for the classes
- Served as role models for participants

Pre and Post-Assessments:

- Each individual was administered a pre and post assessment to determine their knowledge about community issues, systems, leadership, and advocacy. This questionnaire was developed by the Team to reflect the curriculum content.
- The data were analyzed by graduate students and results were used as feedback in planning the next classes.
- Generally, the post-assessment results indicated that the training made a difference. There was evidence of better understanding and improved knowledge.

CLA Mini-Grants

- Each class had approximately \$6,000 for competitive grants to support their community projects. These funds were provided by LEXLINC, a COPC Partner.
- The RFP (Call for Proposal) was given to participants during the 5th Session. It was discussed in Session #6 and in more details in Session #7 (Grant Writing).
- More than 15 mini-grants were awarded to individuals or groups in the three classes ranging from \$140 to \$1000 each. Approximately 85% were considered successful.
- Each grantee was assigned a CLA Team member as an advisor and to provide oversight for the project. Guidelines were given on the implementation process. Awards were announced at Graduation and published in the local media.
- Funds for the mini-grants were deposited in the Community Federal Credit Union. One of the CLA Team members coordinated the budget activities including establishing/closing accounts and monitoring expenditures.

Examples of successful CLA community projects:

1. *“Just Getting Started”*, a summer youth education program that involved 35 teenagers learning how to avoid risky behaviors, to handle peer pressures and build positive relationships.
2. *“Seniors Day Out”*, designed to facilitate intergenerational and social support for older citizens through board games, planting flowers, pot luck dinners, movies, and trips.
3. *“Inner Web”*, a website developed for the Sisters to Sisters program that focuses on breast cancer awareness.
4. *“Grandparent Raising Grandchildren”* project established a resource library at a neighborhood center and a support group for grandparents raising grandchildren.
5. *“Focus on Health”* project resulted in a resource library on health and nutrition set up at the COPC site to support the Health and Wellness program. Reference materials were donated by faculty in the College of Nursing and the Health Department staff.
6. *“After School Tutoring”* for Hispanic students in the neighborhood using volunteers from the university and community.
7. *“Documenting COPC/CLA”* activities, a video production. Two youths were trained in video production while working on this project.
8. *“Youth Summer Spotlight”* focused on career awareness through research and interactions with community residents who share their career paths.
9. *“No Limit to Success”* focused on enhancing talents of young people through a Step Team that has since received regional recognition.
10. *“What Does Love Got to Do With”*, an all-day Saturday workshop attended by more than 35 individuals. The focus was on strengthening relationships as a tool for empowering families and communities.

“There are three types of people: those that make things happen, those that watch things happen, and those who wonder what happened.” – Unknown

Results and Outcomes

- Three CLA classes were successfully implemented, graduating 48 individuals who are now empowered as community advocates and grass roots leaders.
- The CLA graduates experienced the challenges of competing for and implementing grants. Two of those individuals have since competed successfully for funds from other sources to continue their community projects.
- Two CLA graduates organized an ‘Advanced CLA’ class to learn more about some of the topics discussed in their classes such as “Starting a Business”, “Applying for 501(c) 3 status”, and “Tips on Getting Grants”.
- Lexington leaders were very supportive of the CLA. The University of Kentucky President, Dr. Lee Todd and the Lexington Mayor, Teresa Isaac participated in the Graduations by greeting the groups and passing out the Certificates.
- Several graduates agreed to speak to CLA classes about their experiences and community projects. This experience prepared them for active community involvement as they later organized groups.
- Six graduates have also completed the United Way’s “Get on Board” program designed to train citizens how to serve on local Boards, particularly those from under-represented groups.
- Ten graduates were appointed by the Mayor and are now serving on local Boards in the Lexington community. Two of these individuals are now holding leadership positions in their neighborhood associations, president and program chair. These individuals are also seeking a political office- City Council in the First District.
- Andrea James, a CLA graduate, led a group of neighbors in an educational process and protest to stop a pending Council decision on an H-I Overlay as part of the City’s plan for extending a Historic

Preservation project. They were concerned about the cost to and non-support for older low-income residents who would have been forced out of their homes. Their voices were heard and nearly two years later, the issue has not surfaced again. Andrea James is one of the candidates seeking the City Council position.

- Last fall, four CLA graduates appeared before the City Council (in the same Chamber where they experienced the simulation of role playing the Mayor and City Councilpersons). They were well prepared with facts based on research, poised, and enlighten on the issues. Their presentations were well received. In fact, the Council tabled its decision and scheduled a follow-up meeting to hear from more community residents on the issue of building a new street through their neighborhood.
- Several CLA graduates have organized an association that is visionary in planning for community change. The group credits the COPC/CLA with contributing to their education, enlightenment, and empowerment. They are making a difference. I am impressed and proud!

I will pass through this world but once. Any good, therefore, that I can do, or any kindness that I can show, let me do it now. For I shall not pass this way again”

-“Unknown”-