



**NATIONAL LEAGUE OF CITIES**  
**Institute for Youth, Education, and Families**

*A Family Strengthening Agenda for Municipal Leaders*  
*April 24, 2003*

*Moderator: **Julie Bosland**, Program Director, Early Childhood and Family Economic Success  
Institute for Youth, Education, and Families*

*Speakers:*

**Susan Batten** - Senior Program Associate, Annie E. Casey Foundation, Providence, R.I.  
**Carolyn Gatz** - Director of the Greater Louisville Project and consultant to the  
Louisville/Jefferson County, Ky., Metro Government and the Annie E. Casey Foundation

*BOSLAND:* Welcome to today's National League of Cities' audioconference, entitled "A Family Strengthening Agenda for Municipal Leaders." My name is Julie Bosland. I direct the National League of Cities' work on early childhood and family economic success through the Institute for Youth, Education, and Families. And I'll be the host for today's audioconference.

This is actually the 19<sup>th</sup> in a series of audioconferences produced by the Institute, and I would encourage everyone to mark your calendar for the next one, which will take place on June 12 at 12:30 Eastern and will concern financing for programs related to children and families.

Other upcoming activities that are worth noting include (1) a challenge that was recently issued by NLC President John DeStefano, Jr., (Mayor, New Haven, Conn.) calling on at least 100 municipal officials across the country to commit to assessing local early childhood needs and developing a multi-year plan to improve outcomes for young children. Cities that commit to this plan are invited to send up to two representatives to a training and networking meeting here in Washington, D.C. in mid-June. Additionally, (2) you may be interested in a Request for Proposals for technical assistance from the Institute on connecting education and afterschool initiatives as well as (3) an upcoming regional meeting on youth participation. Details on all of these activities can be found on our website at <http://www.nlc.org/iyef>. I would encourage you all to check that out.

Let's turn now to our topic on family strengthening. I'd like to welcome our speakers.

We have Susan Batten with us, who is a Senior Program Associate with the Annie E. Casey Foundation. Susan has been working with a community coalition in Providence, Rhode Island, for three years and more recently has been working intensively with the new mayor and his administration.

I'd also like to welcome Carolyn Gatz, Director of the Greater Louisville Project and consultant to both the Louisville/Jefferson County Metro Government and the Annie E. Casey Foundation.

Susan, I'd like to invite you to start us off with a quick background on what family strengthening means to you all at the Casey Foundation and what the Foundation has been doing in cities across the country.

*BATTEN:* Sure, thanks, Julie. The family strengthening work of the Casey Foundation really is a major part of a national effort – a national initiative – that we call “Making Connections.” The Making Connections agenda is about improving outcomes for children by paying more attention to supporting the families that raise them, as well as taking care of and bettering the environments and the neighborhoods in which those families live.

As many of us have been working on issues around children and poverty for quite some time, the Casey Foundation is partnering with a number of cities to put forward a set of resources and a set of ideas that has turned out for us to be a pretty big and important and intensive effort. But it is based on a very simple concept – children do well when their families do well. But families do well when they live in neighborhoods that are safe, nurturing environments. So the Making Connections initiative is a partnership with a number of cities across the country to do better for families by making their neighborhoods better environments that connect them to the kinds of support that we think are necessary to improve outcomes for kids.

At the heart of the Making Connections agenda – what we mean by “family strengthening” – is that family success is advanced when families actually have better connections to three kinds of supports.

One is a whole host of economic opportunities. When families live in neighborhoods that make it easier to connect to job opportunities, opportunities for job training, opportunities to build assets and accrue savings, availability of affordable housing – that’s sort of the first strand of the family strengthening framework.

The second strand is around connecting families to strong social networks. This is based on the concept that programs and community organizations play a major role in family success. But often it’s the connection of people to people, of neighbor to neighbor, that can provide another protective layer or system of support for families and children who struggle in poor communities. So here in the area of connecting families to social networks, we’re talking about tapping into mutual assistance associations, immigrant and refugee communities, engaging the faith community to use congregations as, again, a system of support for families and a number of other informal ties that we think matter.

The third strand of the Making Connections framework is paying attention to access for families to quality services and supports – responsive organizations, services that are culturally competent, services that are easily accessible – that actually help families reach their goals.

Within the context of the Casey “Making Connections” initiative – and that now is a partnership with many, many cities across the country – when we say “family strengthening,” we mean a neighborhood-based system of support for families that connects them to a broad array of economic opportunities, social networks, and quality services and supports.

Just one other thing that I think is pretty key. We started this effort in 22 cities across the country. We are now in ten of those cities that are described as Phase 2 cities for Making Connections. That means that we actually have been able to come to a set of common results between those cities and the Casey Foundation for the next ten years to measure the extent to which we’re making those connections for families in those neighborhoods.

*BOSLAND:* I think it’s important to say at the outset that, while more intensive work has been

going on with the Casey Foundation in the particular cities that you mentioned, the lessons and the framework can translate to cities and towns of all sizes and all across the country. So we're delighted to have both of you on the call to share some of those lessons and experiences, particularly from Providence and Louisville, with other municipalities and community partners on the line today.

Carolyn, in your work in Louisville, maybe you could start by telling us something about the opportunities that you've had recently to connect with the city and how family strengthening has become a city priority.

*GATZ:* I want to mention that when we talk about Making Connections being involved in ten cities where people are coming together around a certain set of common results that they will aim to achieve for children, families, and neighborhoods, it's more the community itself that we are spending our time with. We're organizing and engaging people at the street level or sidewalk level in the target neighborhoods. Of course, this plays out differently in each city.

In Louisville, we have just implemented the merger of city and county government beginning in January, which a number of people who are involved in cities nationally have probably read about. Louisville voters voted to merge city and county government in November 2000. So this merger took place in January of this year, 2003. This unusual circumstance has allowed for openings to rethink how local government interacts with neighborhoods and families across the board.

This is part of what the Greater Louisville Project, which you mentioned in the beginning, is all about. It's about helping the community as a whole take the opportunity of this enormous change happening in local government to step back and think about how we might want to change how our community – our city – functions. A very important part of this agenda is to bring the agenda of strengthening neighborhoods and supporting families and children more to the forefront.

In Louisville's case, it's been this tremendous opportunity that has allowed us to take the work that was already started by Making Connections into the public sector in a potentially more powerful way, although we're still very much in the beginnings of that process.

*BOSLAND:* What convinced the new mayor or the new administration that this should be something that they pay attention to?

*GATZ:* Well, in part, it was what we did under the auspices of the "Greater Louisville project," which was a project created by a consortium of six foundations – the Casey Foundation and five major local foundations.

We commissioned a study by the Brookings Institution to step back and look at the big picture of where Louisville stacks up compared to other cities and where it's headed. It was a comprehensive look, so it wasn't just about economic development. Many cities have economic development strategies. But this report looked at that piece and then also looked at the strength of neighborhoods and looked at quality of life issues of all kinds.

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| <p>The Brookings Institution Center on Urban and Metropolitan Policy seeks to shape a new generation of urban policies that will help build strong neighborhoods, cities, and metropolitan regions. To view the publication about the city of Louisville and Jefferson County merger, go to: <a href="http://www.brookings.org/dybdocroot/es/urban/louisville/abstract.htm">http://www.brookings.org/dybdocroot/es/urban/louisville/abstract.htm</a>. For more information about the Brookings Institution, go to: <a href="http://www.brookings.org">www.brookings.org</a>, e-mail</p> |
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It had an enormous impact – more than 700 people turned out for the briefings when it was released last July. And since then, we've circulated more than 15,000 copies of the report. It was reprinted in the newspaper over a series of several weeks. And we've done presentations to more than 50 community groups on the Brookings' findings.

This comprehensive agenda by the Brookings Institution put on the table for Louisville in a more powerful way than had been the case previously the issue of working poor families as keys to the city's economic competitiveness, the need for investment in human capital, the need to raise educational attainment, and the need to strengthen neighborhoods as a fundamental part of quality of life in this community. Each of those agenda pieces came through this study in a more powerful way I think than they had been before. And that's part of how it all got raised on the Mayor's agenda.

*BOSLAND:* So tying the city's competitiveness as a whole to each of the neighborhoods and each of the families within the community.

*GATZ:* Exactly.

*BOSLAND:* That's a great lesson. And in Providence, Susan, maybe you could give us some background on how this has really gotten on the municipal agenda more recently.

*BATTEN:* Yes, it's interesting. As Carolyn mentioned, there is something to be said about mobilizing many folks at the neighborhood and community level – at the grass roots level. That really facilitates and sustains citywide attention or municipal attention on these issues. A similar thing happened here in Providence.

Over the last two and a half years, we have been working with families themselves and community-based organizations around a set of priorities and a vision for families in tough neighborhoods here in the city.

It just so happened that we did that at a time when there was a change in leadership, both at the city level and at the state level. And so there was a direct connection with newly elected officials getting to know their constituency. What mattered was that the constituency was clear and focused and had a very specific vision for kids and families. I just mention that to say that, while there are a number of activities for municipal leaders to consider, I think it's so important to talk about the tie between mobilizing folks at the grass roots and neighborhood level and sustaining this on the city's agenda.

Providence, unfortunately, over the last ten years has seen a pretty big jump in its child poverty rate. The new mayor came in with that front and center. We've got a pretty strong advocacy community here. So again, it just so happened that the right people were in the right places during a major change in leadership to help this new mayor begin to develop his family agenda.

Just as you mentioned in Louisville, the success of families, and the strength of the neighborhoods really has everything to do with the competitiveness of the City of Providence. And so that's the other reason I think this elevated quickly.

*BOSLAND:* What you were both talking about relates to a question that we got ahead of time

from a listener who was wondering how community members can put this on the municipal agenda, particularly going into election time when candidates may be running for local office. How could community groups or concerned citizens make sure that family strengthening is an issue that's being talked about? Do you have any further thoughts in addition to the experiences that you both related?

*BATTEN:* I guess the one thing that I would offer is the vision and the capacity for getting this on the agenda is there. But what it takes is an investment in building that agenda for people in the neighborhoods. Again, the importance of organizing – the importance of families having a place and a space to tell their story – is important. I think that's something that really mattered here.

We are in a set of neighborhoods in Providence with our Making Connections initiatives that have many community-based organizations and many family service providers. But we actually put some investment and some energy – and this is across a number of partners – into getting families to tell their stories. I think that goes a long way when you actually have the authentic voice of families. If that connects with a time of election or a change in leadership, it's a time where you line up your advocacy community and your constituency of families that you are attempting to serve. Together, those two are a powerful partnership when it comes to influencing and swaying elected officials.

*GATZ:* I would just add that that my involvement with the Casey Foundation's Making Connections initiative grew out of the work that I had done previously for the city in the [Department of Housing and Urban Development] Empowerment Zone initiative, which I know a lot of people would probably be familiar with, at least conceptually.

HUD's Community Renewal Initiative enables local designees to use a tax-incentive package to open new businesses, provide new jobs, rehabilitate and build new housing, and change lives in urban and rural areas throughout the nation. For more information, go to: <http://www.hud.gov/offices/cpd/economicdevelopment/programs/rc/index.cfm>, or call (202) 708-6339. For local HUD information, go to: <http://www.hud.gov/local/index.cfm>.

And in Louisville, while we did not receive an Empowerment Zone designation, the strategic planning process that was required for applying for that actually turned out to be extremely productive – more people in the inner city became engaged in that than we had ever previously had. So, there was a lot of community buy-in to that strategy. We accomplished a lot of things during the 90s. But when that mayor left office, I watched it sort of fall apart.

One of my learnings – which I think is part of what the Casey Foundation had decided from its own experience with major foundation initiatives – was that the only way that you can sustain the focus on the hard work of turning around highly distressed neighborhoods and really making a difference for children who live in poverty is if the community itself becomes engaged, committed, and mobilized, which I think is what Susan is talking about. Because then you can keep the agenda front and center. Otherwise, during the comings and goings of administrations in cities, the agenda can be lost at various times unless you have the community itself mobilized to sustain it.

*BOSLAND:* Carolyn, I just want to follow up on that in terms of engaging folks – on something that you mentioned in passing earlier about community discussions that you had on

specific topics that may have come out of the Brookings' report or on other issues of concern in the community. How did you go about engaging with either community members or key stakeholders on some of these important issues?

**GATZ:** Well, all we have done thus far is to engage, as Susan said, community-based groups. Louisville is not as well organized, probably, as Providence. We don't have as many community-based organizations. We don't have a really strong Community Development Corporation network, which I know a lot of other cities – Cleveland, for example – do have. That probably varies somewhat with the region of the country and other factors.

What has happened here, particularly with Making Connections, is the Casey Foundation is actually investing in community organizing per se, which we have not really ever had as much of in Louisville as in many other cities. I think Susan has a different experience of this in that they have actually convened a lot of large community gatherings. But most of what we've done thus far has been to connect with existing community-based organizations by going to their meetings, presenting this agenda, and having a discussion.

**BOSLAND:** And I believe the Greater Louisville Project sponsored some “best practice” sessions?

**GATZ:** Yes.

**BOSLAND:** Maybe you can talk a little bit more about how those worked in terms of investigating some particular topics of interest.

**GATZ:** Those were over the course of last year, and they were specifically related to the creation of this new local government – the merged city/county government. We worked with the National Academy of Public Administration. We chose a set of five key topical areas and convened groups of 70 or 80 or 90 people, depending on the topic, for daylong seminars. We brought in people from three or four other cities in most cases. We worked with the National Academy of Public Administration to identify who those people might be.

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| <p>The National Academy of Public Administration is a nonpartisan organization chartered by Congress to assist federal, state, and local governments in improving their effectiveness, efficiency, and accountability. For more information, go to <a href="http://www.napawash.org">www.napawash.org</a>, e-mail <a href="mailto:academy@napawash.org">academy@napawash.org</a>, or call (202) 347-3190.</p> |
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We did one on the reinvention of government that brought in Ted Gabler, for example, who wrote the book *Reinventing Government*.

Then in August, we had one specifically around how some cities are organizing their delivery of services by geographic area rather than by the traditional functional areas. And we had people who had been involved with Charlotte's “City Within a City.” One of these people is now the City Manager of San Jose, California. That best practice session was about the inner workings of city government. It was the nuts and bolts – how you organize the mechanics of city delivery of services. But it was also about why you might rethink how you deliver those services – around the concept of making neighborhoods stronger as places with a high quality of life. So, it blended the nuts and bolts of how you are going to set up this new government with the larger agenda of the quality of life in neighborhoods.

Then, we did one around workforce development that was similar in bringing people from three or four different cities. Then, the last one that we did was on civic-based education advocacy groups. It was about pushing an education reform agenda from a community-wide perspective.

*BOSLAND:* I think those provide an interesting model, and I think could be effective whether or not a government is changing. It could be used by a current administration to bring people together, to learn from innovative ideas in other cities, and to really get community members together to talk about what are some interesting best practices and where the city could go. That's something we try to promote here at the Institute – cross-city sharing.

Susan, how does that experience relate to what you've seen happening in Providence? How has the city interacted with community groups or community members?

*BATTEN:* I think we're right on the cusp of watching a new way of working with families here in Providence for the city itself. Our conversations with the new mayor have been about two things – building a family agenda, but also working with families in new and different ways.

One of the things that is on the top of the list is the city seeing itself in a role of convener and in valuing the opportunities for families in poor neighborhoods to talk with city leaders about their plight, about their vision, and about ways to make things better for their children.

So I think we're right at the beginning stages of convenings. We're starting to see similar convenings around issues of education, afterschool programming, and youth development. But behind those convenings, I think, is a value and a principle of this new administration to work *alongside* communities and families. Our experiences here are about convening broad stakeholder groups of folk. There is nothing more powerful than a municipal leader sitting in a working group with a struggling family, or sitting in a working group with a community-based organization and a family service provider.

Convenings are a pretty important strategy here for the City of Providence. I think what underlies that is we've got to get closer connections and stronger relationships with the constituency and communities.

*BOSLAND:* That's great. You know, a lot of what we're talking about here – the communication – goes back to partnerships. I think what I'm hearing from both of you is that partnerships are at the core of a family strengthening agenda, whether it's partnerships with community-based groups or coalitions and partnerships directly with families. Carolyn, who would you say are currently the city's partners in this effort? Or who do you think should be at the table as you move this forward?

*GATZ:* Well, from the perspective of the Casey Foundation's Making Connections site team, I'd say that metro government is a key partner who is really just now coming to the table through the creation of the new local government. The role that I now have is trying to broker, or build, the partnership between the two.

The other key partners who are part of this agenda are organizations like Metro United Way, CARE, the Community Foundation of Louisville, and the other foundations that have been part of funding the Greater Louisville Project. The Asset Building Coalition, which I think you alluded to earlier, is a partnership of 90 organizations that formed specifically to

increase the EITC (Earned Income Tax Credit) coming to working poor families and to sponsor the VITA (Volunteer Income Tax Assistance) centers.

And, then various social service agencies. Louisville, through its former county government, has a decentralized one-stop social service delivery system operated by the government called Neighborhood Place. It is, I think, fairly well known around the country. The Neighborhood Places are another key partner. [[www.neighborhoodpl.org](http://www.neighborhoodpl.org).]

I was just going to mention that I think part of this work comes from some corporate sector ideas, such as really listening to customers. We had a conversation at what we call the “Family Strengthening Table,” which is where all these institutional partners come together. The CEO of Metro United Way talked about how, in his experience, people in the social services field have only fairly recently begun to think about the idea of really listening to their customers in a profound way. Which is basically what Susan was talking about – when poor families can come to the table and explain how the system looks and works from their perspective. Then you have a shot at changing how it works. You can get people to really focus on making it work from the customer’s perspective.

*BATTEN:* I would just add to that, Julie, that Carolyn is mentioning a Family Strengthening Table. The importance of having that infrastructure, that coordinating council, that place where many people – including the local government – come together to talk about a family agenda in specific neighborhoods is something that is really important. The partners vary from city to city, but having that place in which cities actually invest ensures that there is an infrastructure that can bring together a group of people concerned about strengthening families. I think this is really important.

*BOSLAND:* This brings us back to that convener role that you were emphasizing earlier.

As we’re talking about partnerships, I wanted to raise another question that came in from a listener who works in a university in the Department of Health Promotion and Human Development. This individual is seeking some of your thoughts on how academic institutions can be involved in city efforts to strengthen families. Have universities been involved in either of the cities you’ve worked with, or do you have any other thoughts about the roles that they can play?

*GATZ:* Here in Louisville, they have been involved to some degree, mostly through research and data gathering. One of the key elements of the Casey Foundation’s Making Connections efforts is that each city has something they call a local learning partnership. I guess you would say those are basically research centers. Here, the University of Louisville has done some work under the auspices of the local learning partnership. I know also – because we are thinking about doing this here – that a number of cities have what they call a higher education consortium that works with the metro government or the local government and other partners in the same way that we’ve been describing to connect the university and its resources to community needs and to community change initiatives and projects.

*BATTEN:* We have one of those consortia here in Providence – the Health and Education Leadership Partnership (HELP) – which is a coming together of hospitals and universities in the city of Providence.

HELP and its members hope that by combining their resources, energy, and expertise, they can more effectively serve the City's people. For more information, go to [www.helprov.org](http://www.helprov.org), email [msmith@helprov.org](mailto:msmith@helprov.org), or call (401) 941-3300.

Together, they provide an incredible set of resources, both dollars and human resources, to help move an agenda around kids and families. For example, over the last two years, they have been instrumental in reducing rates of lead poisoning in Providence. That all comes from a concerted effort across the hospitals and universities.

So, here in Providence, HELP is at the table, and is on our coordinating council for Making Connections. But we also have individual relationships with some universities like Brown University and the Rhode Island School of Design.

Just a couple of thoughts that come to mind about a university's role in efforts to promote better outcomes for kids and families – and again, I'm going to focus on the family strengthening aspect of this – is if we care about kids, we really need to focus on ensuring that the families have what they need to do their job, which is to raise their children.

There are a couple of lessons that have come out of our work with universities in Making Connections and other Casey investments. One is to make it as clear as possible to the community itself the access point into the university. We have a number of great institutions of higher education here in Rhode Island. But, what department or individual professor has a particular interest? One of the things that we've encouraged universities to do is to centralize an intake point for a community that might be interested in partnering, just to make it a little bit easier to navigate the university structure. Also, clearly look at the resources as they relate to research.

The other thing that we have done here – particularly with hospitals, but I think it's a parallel lesson for universities that are located in or near poor communities – is to really think about the economic resources. How in fact the university is an anchor in that community, an economic engine in that community. If we're talking about helping poor families, that university ought to be thinking seriously about itself as an employer and thinking about the extent to which it's reaching out to families in that neighborhood, i.e.: helping build job training and job prep programs to get families in that neighborhood good paying jobs at that university, or for that university to think about how it supports small businesses in those neighborhoods often led by budding entrepreneurs that are made up of families from diverse backgrounds attempting to increase their earnings and their assets. Universities are major players when it comes to supporting local neighborhood, family-run businesses that have a direct impact on kids and families. Those are just a few things that come to mind.

*BOSLAND:* Thanks. I'd like to circle around again to the idea that Carolyn mentioned earlier about listening to customers. I think in all that we've been talking about, that a key part of family strengthening is to really understand what families need, and then work alongside those families and communities.

Are there particular strategies that you would recommend if a municipal government got interested in reaching out and engaging parents in an effective way that might get beyond the typical audiences? Sometimes you see town hall meetings where it's the same people coming out and voicing particular individual gripes. I think cities are really looking for strategies to get engaged with families in a more meaningful way to tackle some of these big issues that are occurring in cities. Any tips from either of you?

*GATZ:* In the best practices session that we did on cities relating to neighborhoods, one of the speakers, who was someone who had been a city manager I believe in Richmond, Va., made the point that many cities had come to believe that they themselves really did need to invest in organizing neighborhoods because the stronger the neighborhood itself is – in terms of its own local association or neighborhood organization – the stronger a partner it was with the city.

What we're trying to find out here in Louisville is if you can really engage residents, particularly those in distressed neighborhoods, in taking advantage of economic opportunities and job training and that sort of thing. Can you go at it from the grass roots or sidewalk level, and try to figure out how to make the system work from that level? I don't think we know the answer to that.

Specifically, though, about listening to customers – I think there's a lot to be learned from the private sector. One of the things I know that the local government here and also the Casey Foundation is considering doing is some surveying to really gauge: What do customers want? What do the people at the neighborhood level want? What would really make a difference in how they perceive their environment in terms of its cleanliness and safety?

Many cities have discovered by talking to people in distressed neighborhoods that the sense of safety goes way beyond the crime statistics. You have to look at things like graffiti, overgrown lots, illegal dumping, boarded-up buildings, and all those things – they all play into people's sense of safety.

We have a number of experiments trying to figure out how to connect in a more meaningful way with customers. But I don't think we have that all figured out or have the answers.

*BATTEN:* We're in a similar place, Carolyn, again, because the administration is new and growing here. I just can't say enough about the investment in organizing as you are describing. There is nothing that can be as important as putting the time in to create the partnership. And so for me that's speaks a lot to identifying some real trusted advocates.

It's clear that is what's happening in the city of Providence right now. There is development of a new Office of Neighborhood Services, and its vision is long-term: to get to a place where Louisville has been for quite some time, to actually have something like "Neighborhood Places" across the city. I know there is very deliberate and careful identification of people in neighborhoods by the city administration now who are trusted in those communities that in fact will be the face of the city government.

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| For more information about Providence's Office of Neighborhood Services, go to: <a href="http://www.providenceri.com/neighborhood_services/index.html">http://www.providenceri.com/neighborhood_services/index.html</a> , or call (401) 421-2489. |
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One thing that comes to mind for me is that people listen and trust people that are like themselves. In what ways can we as city governments actually work with the trusted leaders that are there as agents – as an extension of city leadership – in order to engage families and parents in a new and different way. Putting in the time to ensure that there is common vision across a city government and families and neighborhoods, I think, is critical. And really making sure that there is a place at the table for families.

You know, there are strategies about convenings and town hall meetings and the like. Often we know those kinds of forums aren't really about dialogue. They aren't conducive to real communication about common interest and vision. Other kinds of strategies are necessary

– ones that are perhaps led by trusted neighborhood leaders. We always have to be mindful in asking ourselves, “Are we really making a place at the table?” It’s one thing to ask families and constituents what they want. It’s another thing to make seats available on boards and commissions, really making sure that there is opportunity for new faces and new voices to come forward.

*BOSLAND:* I heard a couple different strands there in building up neighborhood leadership: the idea of city-neighborhood liaisons and the idea of getting neighborhood residents on advisory councils. In some communities we’ve seen youth or family councils that actually advise the mayor. I think we’ve seen some interesting things in some other communities as well in terms of engaging residents, or even youth. As you were saying, residents may be more likely to trust their neighbors. Using residents or young people from a particular community to canvass their neighbors about the things that are important to them is one more creative way that cities can reach out to, learn from, and partner with community members.

I’d like to turn now to some action steps. I know that family strengthening is really an overall approach or lens for cities. But I think it leads to certain actions that can be taken to help strengthen families along the lines of several of the connections that you were mentioning earlier, Susan – connections to economic opportunities, to strong social networks, and to quality services and supports. So I was wondering if we could spend a few minutes talking about some of the specific actions that you think are on the table for the cities you’re working with – priorities that will develop over time.

Carolyn, maybe you could start from Louisville’s perspective. Are there particular actions that you see that the city is interested in, or could get involved in, particularly around supporting connections to economic opportunity?

*GATZ:* Yes. This community is involved in Kentucky education reform, which at the state level has driven a lot of change in public education. In the last couple of years, the same reform effort has moved to higher education. There are very aggressive goals for adult education, for GEDs, and for community colleges. That’s another arena in which there is a new level of awareness of the power of having one local government, as opposed to two – of having the metro mayor as the convener, and the ability to use that bully pulpit for a community-wide agenda around things like raising educational attainment.

There’s a lot of work here around opportunities to connect to jobs, better paying jobs, particularly around specific sectors like healthcare. I’m sure that’s true in almost every community in this country. We try to create the access point for people who live in our neighborhoods to take advantage of those opportunities.

The other specific thing that we have here in Louisville, which is fairly extraordinary, I think, is that UPS [United Parcel Service], which is the largest employer here, created something called the Metropolitan College. It is a way to gain access to labor for its own overnight package handling at the air hub here. It’s an effort with a consortium of all of the higher education, junior college, and technical schools here to modify scheduling and modify the location of classes and all that sort of thing, so that people who took jobs at UPS could go to college for free, receive stipends, and have a job.

I’m sure there are certain other sectors here where the opportunities are just as extraordinary. The real challenge is making those opportunities accessible to people who live in these neighborhoods: because of all that’s happened historically, a lot of people in inner city

neighborhoods don't believe that they can have access to those opportunities. Again, it seems to me, the real challenge is getting the community itself to help figure out how to connect people to those opportunities.

*BOSLAND:* That's great – partnerships with colleges and universities, promoting educational attainment, connecting families to growing economic sectors. I just wanted to throw in one other concept that you had brought up earlier. We've been working here at the Institute to encourage more municipal leaders to do outreach to connect families to supports like the Earned Income Tax Credit (EITC), which is a federal tax credit for low-income working families, often with a state corollary.

For information about the Institute's work on family economic success, go to [http://www.nlc.org/nlc\\_org/site/programs/institute\\_for\\_youth\\_education\\_and\\_families/economic.cfm](http://www.nlc.org/nlc_org/site/programs/institute_for_youth_education_and_families/economic.cfm).

Many times, families aren't taking advantage of this benefit, either because they don't know about it or because the forms are too complicated, and they don't have access to free tax assistance.

You had mentioned earlier that you've taken this approach there in Louisville, including outreach to let people know about the EITC free tax assistance through volunteers, and connections to financial literacy, banking, and other programs to help build their assets. The result is a two-part focus: both connecting people to better jobs as well as helping them supplement that income and build wealth through those jobs.

*GATZ:* Yes. The Earned Income Tax Credit is in fact the largest federal income support mechanism. It's the largest anti-poverty mechanism in existence in our country today. If a working poor family files for the Earned Income Tax Credit, they can receive \$1,200, \$1,500, \$1,800, \$2,000, back through the tax credit, which oftentimes can be the down payment on a car or perhaps even a house. I mean, that is an amazing access point to the potential for gaining assets. That's sort of the new agenda for mayors. For example, I know that Mayor Daley in Chicago has done a lot with that issue, and I'm sure that the National League of Cities is making mayors and other elected officials across the country aware of how potentially powerful that is.

*BOSLAND:* Yes, we've seen that local officials have seen this as a win/win for everyone. The number of city leaders who have been involved in outreach has grown from just a handful a couple years ago up to perhaps close to 100 in this current tax-filing season. So that's been exciting.

*GATZ:* I just want to say one more thing about that. In Louisville, if every family that's eligible for the Earned Income Tax Credit filed for it, it's something like \$26 million a year in added income to those families. The actual filing level here was very low. I think they've got it up to something like \$8 million that they're bringing back. But that's an enormous asset for these communities, these neighborhoods, and those families. \$26 million a year of hard cash is an important thing.

*BOSLAND:* Absolutely. Susan, maybe you could talk about connecting families to needed services and supports. I know that these can run the gamut from education to affordable housing,

child care and afterschool programs, public safety, health and nutrition, child welfare, and domestic violence issues. What do you think is on the top of the Mayor's agenda in Providence, and how do you think that can be leveraged into a broader family strengthening initiative?

*BATTEN:* Mayor David Cicilline is extremely interested in building and expanding community schools here in the city of Providence. So much of his work right now is a wonderful learning journey about how to turn schools into hubs of activity and systems of support for families. We are ecstatic about that and doing everything that we can from the Casey Foundation to help build this community school initiative. Think about our neighborhoods here. We're working in the South Side of Providence where we probably have about five to six schools. And imagine those being real anchors, real places for families in these neighborhoods to connect to other sources of support that they need.

So that's on the horizon. I think the Making Connections initiative can offer a couple of things to building a community schools initiative about responsive services for families.

We are going to help the city again in its role as a convener to bring a common set of results – a common vision – to the set of service providers and community-based organizations around how to make services more responsive to families. We've done a few convenings to date, and it is pretty amazing how service providers don't in fact have opportunities to talk amongst themselves about the work that they do and to really know what each brings to the table. Usually, of course, given funding crises and the like, service providers are in sort of competitive modes. But there is a strategy here, and we're going to sort of help bolster it to make programs and services more effective for families. We've got to really invest in the convening and the common vision among family service providers. I am talking now about the gamut of direct family service providers, including Community Development Corporations (CDCs) – organizations that focus on workforce development and adult literacy. We are taking a sector-by-sector approach – both within sector and cross-sector approaches – where we are identifying what we call gear organizations within a sector. We are identifying a CDC that will be the convener of other CDCs. We are identifying a family service provider in these neighborhoods that will be the convener of other family service providers.

That “within sector” approach to determining what families need and how to change our systems of support to get there comes together at our larger Making Connections’ “family strengthening table,” as Carolyn talks about it. We want to be able to weave this into Mayor Cicilline's community schools initiative – the resources, those providers around the schools. We need to do our job to make sure that they are ready to do things differently and connect to families that are at those schools.

The other thing we're doing in terms of making services more supportive, more accessible, and more culturally competent is partnering with existing informal networks – the social networks that do exist. This is where you get some synergy across the different strands of a family strengthening agenda.

We really believe that much activity for families – much support and help for families – comes from less formal organizations. So for example, we've got a huge investment here with the mutual assistance associations. Providence is a very diverse place – 62 languages spoken in the public schools here. And we've made very strategic partnerships with the Cambodian Society, the Liberian Association, the Dominican Association, and the Laotian Association. They are really cultural groups. People think of these groups as running the

Dominican Day Parade or something like that. But quite honestly, they do more social services and frontline help for families than many of our more formal institutions do.

We've got a re-alignment and connecting strategy that says the hub might be the community school. The community school is going to reach out to the service providers that are in that neighborhood. But those service providers will have direct links to informal systems of support that often aren't recognized that are really taking care of families. We hope to bring that alignment and connecting strategy between informal services and more formal services to Cicilline's agenda around community schools.

*BOSLAND:* Good. I'll go back to each of you for your ten-to-fifteen second closing words. If a new city official were interested in promoting a family strengthening agenda, what would be your one-line parting advice on where they should get started?

*GATZ:* I guess I would say: think about it as a lens or a point of view, a perspective, or a philosophy. Then, if you think about it that way, you would probably see a lot of different opportunities presenting themselves. I think one of the things that's really interesting about Making Connections is that each city is following a different path, as Susan has said. So which are the right opportunities? If you come at it just from this lens of thinking about how to strengthen families and neighborhoods, I'm sure that any city would find a different set of opportunities to work across boundaries and to move this agenda forward.

*BATTEN:* I would just add to that, start with families themselves. Really place the emphasis on talking and listening to the customer as we've described. And invest in shaping a common vision that will lead you forward.

*BOSLAND:* Great. Thank you so much for joining us on this conference call. We were delighted to have both of our speakers with us here today, as well as a large and diverse group of folks who are listening in from around the country. And I hope you will all join us again for an audioconference in the future. Thanks, and have a great afternoon.