

Hartford Foundation for Public Giving

Putnam Workshop Executive Summary

The Hartford Foundation for Public Giving hosted a workshop on Narrowing the Opportunity Gap in July 2016. The workshop was attended by 80 members of 16 funding organizations from throughout Connecticut and featured guest speaker, Dr. Robert Putnam. Dr. Putnam shared research and views from his 2015 book, *Our Kids: The American Dream in Crisis*.

According to Putnam:

- Despite the progress that has been made in the last 50 years, our society increasingly is coming apart along economic or social class lines.
- Low-income children typically live in more dangerous communities and neighborhoods, go to less effective, low-income schools, and have just one parent at home.
- Middle- and upper-class children have access to high-quality education and enrichment activities.
- It is estimated that the opportunity gap has a societal cost of \$5 trillion in the form of criminal justice, health care, and lost contribution costs.
- We need to think of low-income children affected by the opportunity gap as “our children.”

Connecticut statistics were also shared which validated that the opportunity gap is a local issue.

Group Discussions

Workshop participants then engaged in facilitated table discussions around two important questions.

A sampling of participant discussions was shared with the group and Dr. Putnam responded to participants with his perspective and insights. All group discussion responses were captured on flipcharts from which the following common themes were identified:

Question 1: As funders and conveners, how do we need to think and act differently to collectively leverage our unique roles in the state?

- Using Data in Decision Making
- Engaging in Open Dialogue
- Leveraging learning and successes
- Advocating for changes in public policy
- Collaborating across organizations and towns
- Addressing inequity in public education funding
- Providing wrap-around services
- Eliminating inefficiencies within the philanthropic system

Question 2: What efforts, if any, are working now—statewide, regionally or locally?

Programs to Model:

- Cradle to career community coalitions such as:
 - Waterbury Bridge to Success
 - New Britain Coalition
 - STRIVE.
- Special interest collaborations such as:
 - Early Childhood Funders Collaboration
 - Office of Early Childhood
 - Homelessness Prevention

Continue to Build On:

- Provide education and create awareness of the opportunity gap
- Leverage collective resources and influence
- Develop common language and metrics
- Identify and fund successful workforce development models
- Support kids to support their peers through up-stander approach
- Take a two-generation approach

Recommended Next Steps

In order to keep the conversation about the opportunity gap going and initiate further statewide collaboration to solve this issue, KJR Consulting recommends taking the following steps:

1. Download and read the *Closing the Opportunity Gap* report recommended by Dr. Putnam (available at <https://www.theopportunitygap.com/the-report>).
2. Find out if a forum exists for communities across the country to exchange ideas about this topic. If not, consider establishing one.
3. Establish a leadership structure to organize volunteers going forward. Reach out to workshop participants via survey to solicit volunteers to join an ongoing committee(s) focused on addressing this issue at the state level. The survey should also include questions to identify the specific interests of the volunteer, as well as the level of involvement they are willing to commit to and any special skills or resources they can contribute.
4. Establish a schedule of regular follow-up meetings, either quarterly or semiannually, for the committee(s) to reconvene.
5. Have different organizations host the quarterly meetings on a rotating basis in order to alleviate any one organization from the burden of organizing, hosting, and leading all of the subsequent meetings.
6. Consider using an outside facilitator to help plan and lead regular meetings. This would reduce the burden of leadership, while keeping the group's collaborative efforts moving forward. The facilitator can guide the committee through specific processes for problem diagnosis, collective visioning, assignment of roles and tasks, and the recording/reporting of decisions and agreements.