

Conclusion

THIS IS A NATION OF PROBLEM SOLVERS. In communities across America, nonprofit organizations, local governments, and citizens' groups are working together to find solutions to our most pressing challenges. Whether the issue is health care, affordable housing, economic development, or civic engagement, solutions are springing up throughout the nation. Solutions for America was an effort to identify, document, analyze, and tell the story of these successes.

From the start, we knew what we didn't want: more of what had come before. We didn't want a top-down, university-based research design that would extract information from programs for a centralized process of data analysis. Such an approach would have provided uniformity and objective analysis, but at the cost of the kind of ground-level insight and collaborative relationships that could only be gained by working with the sites and communities themselves. At the same time, we wanted to avoid leaving the programs to fend for themselves, entirely responsible for conducting and reporting their own research. Such an approach would have undermined uniformity and objectivity, and would have placed a severe strain on the capacity of most of the programs, which, after all, are primarily in the business of service delivery.

The solution was the hub-and-spoke model. It resulted from a process of extensive deliberation, sporadic inspiration, and some old fashioned trial and error. The network of local research partners working closely with each of the nineteen sites, with coordination and guidance from a central hub, represented the best of both worlds: systematic, objective data gathering combined with in-depth, on-the-ground knowledge and perspective. The result was the insight, the lessons, and, we hope, the model for future research that characterized Solutions for America.

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