

# The Lessons Learned from the



## *The Community Capacity Building Efforts of the Baltimore Empowerment Zone Village Centers*

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## Executive Summary

The Empower Baltimore Management Corporation (EBMC) retained the Jacob France Institute to analyze the lessons learned from the Baltimore Empowerment Zone's community capacity building efforts. The lessons learned were identified through a focus group and interview based analysis of key informants in each of the Village Centers and with EBMC staff and Board members. The experience of the Baltimore Empowerment Zone on capacity building is important because of the significant effort made to build sustainable community development capacity to continue to act as change agents serving each of the Empowerment Zone communities after the formal sunset of EBMC. The experience of the Baltimore Empowerment Zone in building community capacity can serve to assist in the sustainability planning of the Village Centers and provide information to other local capacity building efforts.

The communities targeted by the Baltimore Empowerment Zone were among the most distressed communities in the City. Distressed communities often lack core elements of local capacity – sometimes called social capital -- to control, implement or even adapt to change. The communities often lack strong, community driven institutions to represent community interests; have a history of local conflict both between residents and between residents and institutions; have a lack of internal resources; and are outside of the traditional City power structure.

By design, the Baltimore Empowerment Zone set out on the difficult and time consuming task of building new community development capacity in the form of Village Centers. Six Village Centers were created and five are still in operation. Each of these Village Centers had to overcome significant internal and external barriers to become functioning organizations. The experience of these Village Centers and the Baltimore Empowerment Zone points to several key factors in building community capacity. Important among these are *community mobilization, communications, conflict resolution, the importance of community momentum, and the importance of technical assistance.*

The most successful Village Centers were able to mobilize and engage their community in Village Center operations though traditional community organizing. Successful Village Centers identified and directly addressed local conflicts early in the organization-building process. Village Centers in communities where some redevelopment was occurring or that had a strong institutional or economic base also tended to form stronger organizations. All of the Village Centers reported that technical assistance was invaluable in overcoming community barriers.

The community capacity building experience of the Baltimore Empowerment Zone can be summarized into the following ten lessons:

***Lesson 1: Time Matters*** – The original goal for the Baltimore Empowerment Zone was to spend down its money over a five-year period. This proved to be impossible and the rush to spend down, created problems in that the Village Center could not spend sufficient time on the difficult task of planning for or creating new organizations. A longer start up process would have allowed more time for community mobilization and planning and more extensive early technical assistance. This would have likely created more viable and sustainable organizations. Village Centers also focused on becoming operational and delivering services and only later began to plan for long-term sustainability. Overall, an earlier emphasis on sustainability and creating linkages with the larger City power structure would have also potentially yielded stronger, more sustainable organizations.

***Lesson 2: History Matters*** – Village Centers with a history of failed policy interventions – Self Motivated and Harlem Park – or a history of conflict with key institutions over redevelopment –

HEBCAC – were less likely to form strong sustainable organizations. It proved to be difficult to overcome residents' cynicism about past failures or substantial power differentials relative to dominant institutions. However, Village Centers – such as East Harbor – that put a direct and early focus on addressing a past history of conflicts (between the area's African American community and a leading organization) created stronger organizations. Thus, any effort to build community capacity must recognize the historical context of past efforts in a community.

**Lesson 3: Momentum Matters** - One of the most critical findings of this research is that community momentum matters. It is easier to engage the community and keep them engaged in a change process if an area is in the path of development activities, as was the case with both East Harbor and Washington Village. Community momentum provides a reason for residents to become involved, in order to either benefit from or protect their interests in the face of redevelopment activities. More importantly, community momentum provides incentives for the City's power structure – government, businesses, developers, and foundations -- to pay attention to community organizations because they can stop or delay development projects. Community momentum also provides incentives for other investments in the community – as development makes the return on housing, workforce development or economic development programs more attractive to external funders.

**Lesson 4: Community Mobilization Matters** – Village Centers with a stronger record of community involvement – East Harbor and Washington Village – created both stronger and more sustainable organizations. All of the Village Centers reported that they would have benefited from more extensive community outreach and engagement activities. More extensive community involvement was also considered as aiding in organizational sustainability, as external funders – most importantly foundations -- were more likely to support organizations with high levels of community engagement.

In mobilizing the community, *overcoming conflict* is the key. There are numerous sources of conflict in a community. Conflict can be race-based – as with East Harbor, Washington Village, and to some extent Poppleton, class-based, or history-based as with Self Motivated, or between newcomers and existing residents – as with Washington Village. The core to conflict resolution is effective community mobilization. Organizations that were able to get past the conflict and mobilize the community to address common issues became stronger organizations.

**Lesson 5: Leadership Matters** - The presence of strong, engaged local leadership is critical to the success of community building efforts. The experience of the Baltimore Empowerment Zone does not point to a single model of effective leadership. East Harbor is an example of a strong, staff-led organization while Washington Village is an example of a board-led organization. Community leadership can also be based on hiring and training local residents – where East Harbor was successful, or hiring a professional staff – such as Washington Village. Harlem Park focused on hiring local residents to run the Village Center, but according to some key informants this created a reluctance to remove local staff when they were not seen as effective by at least some members of the Board.

**Lesson 6: Linkages/Networks Matter** – The Village Centers that created the strongest internal (within the community) and external (with the larger City/State) linkages created the strongest organizations. Washington Village provides the best example in terms of the strength of both its internal and external networks. This Village Center has stronger board participation by the many organizations within the community than other Village Centers and created a stronger more representative organization. It also had strong Board participation by external organizations – such as local institutions and City government – which attracted both resources and programs into the

community. All of the Village Centers seemed to focus on attracting key community leaders to their Board. In the opinion of this consultant, the capacity building efforts of the Empowerment Zone would have been strengthened if both the Village Centers and EBMC had done more to attract more participation by non-community stakeholders – such as foundations, non-profits or City agencies – on to the Village Center boards.

**Lesson 7: Politics Matter** – Politics can support or hinder the development of community development capacity. In its early days, HEBCAC's strong ties to the City's political leadership allowed the Village Center to attract significant City and external funding and programs. However, once the administration changed, HEBCAC was sidelined, its core staff leadership left, and the City created a competing organization to direct redevelopment in its area.

**Lesson 8: Communications Matter** – Effective communications is essential in any community capacity building efforts, especially in a large-scale, City-level approach like the Baltimore Empowerment Zone. Effective *internal* communications strategies between the coordinating agency – in this case EBMC – and the community organizations (Village Centers) will ensure that all are working towards common goals and that community organizations are aware of technical assistance opportunities or other issues. Effective *external* communications are critical for both the coordinating agency and the community organizations in order to control the expectations of the community, inform other key stakeholders on the status and results of efforts, and engage and mobilize the community in the activities of the community organization.

**Lesson 9: Planning Matters** – One of the most important successes of the Baltimore Empowerment Zone's community capacity building effort is the creation of community-driven master plans for each of the Village Center areas. In many cases these were the communities' first opportunities to create *their own* plans for *their own communities*. All of the Village Centers reported that the community planning process was an important means of engaging their community in the activities of the Village Center. For most Village Centers, the Land Use Plan required and funded by EBMC served as the long-term guide for their efforts, even after it was 5 to 7 years old. Several Village Centers supplemented their land use plan with their own strategic plans, and Washington Village revisited its strategic plan every year or so.

**Lesson 10: Goal-Setting, Monitoring, Evaluation and Technical Assistance is Critical** -- EBMC was engaged in a long-term process of working with the Village Centers to set annual goals, which were required as a part of receiving administrative funding, and monitoring and evaluating progress towards those goals. EBMC used a 'carrot and a stick' approach to monitoring and evaluation. When Village Centers missed stated goals they needed to present reasons to the EBMC Quality of Life/Capacity Building Subcommittee who could: a) sanction the Village Centers (some had their funding cut until a problem was remedied – others – Self Motivated were de-funded); b) provide additional time to meet goals or address issues; or c) could provide technical assistance to address any problems. Surprisingly, only one Village Center complained about the EBMC monitoring and evaluation process. The goal setting and monitoring efforts put in place by EBMC allowed it to recognize the problems with the Self Motivated Village Center early, and when efforts to address the problems failed, terminate funding. All Village Centers reported that they benefited from the technical assistance received, and the major complaint about technical assistance was either that Village Centers were not aware they could receive it (See Lesson 8) or needed more of it.

## 1.0 Introduction

The Empower Baltimore Management Corporation (EBMC) retained the Jacob France Institute to analyze the lessons learned through the Baltimore Empowerment Zone's efforts to build community development capacity through the creation of six Village Centers. The lessons learned were identified through a focus group and interview based analysis that collected information on:

1. The barriers that had to be overcome for the Village Centers to become operational;
2. The issues that needed to be addressed in Village Center operations; and
3. The lessons learned from the experience of the capacity building efforts of the Baltimore Empowerment Zone.

Focus groups were conducted in each of the five operational Village Centers and interviews were conducted with numerous persons active with the start-up and operation of the Self-Motivated People's Community Village Center, which was closed by EBMC in 2001. A final focus group was held with EBMC staff and members of the EBMC Board of Director's Sustainability Committee where the preliminary findings of this analysis were presented and discussed and staff and Board perceptions of the critical issues identified. Interviews were also conducted with persons that could not attend focus groups or to supplement the information collected. The goal of this analysis was to collect qualitative, perception and opinion-based process and impact information from persons active in the capacity building efforts of the Baltimore Empowerment Zone.

This report is a companion to *The Community Capacity Building Impacts of the Baltimore Empowerment Zone: An Overview of the Community Development Capacity of the Five Operating Baltimore Empowerment Zone Village Centers* report prepared for EBMC in June 2004.

## 2.0 Perceptions of Barriers to Village Center Formation

Baltimore City received notification in December 1994 that the City would become one of six federal Urban Empowerment Zones. Central to Baltimore's Empowerment Zone application and strategy was the creation of local community capacity to effect change. The *Baltimore Empowerment Strategic Plan* (the application to HUD for the Baltimore Empowerment Zone) specifically called for the development of new community-driven institutions for achieving change. These new institutions were to be created at two levels. An independent, quasi-governmental *Empowerment Zone Management Council* (EBMC) was created to oversee the management and implementation of programs for the entire zone. Eight *Village Centers* were proposed to create local strategic plans and needs assessments, connect residents to Empowerment Zone and other programs, and serve to coordinate community and Empowerment Zone efforts. Six Village Centers were ultimately created with five Village Centers still currently in operation after one was shut down by EBMC.

Community-level planning for the formation of the Village Centers started in many cases before the development of formal guidelines and EBMC assigned a lead City staff person to work with communities in each of the six areas that were planning to form Village Centers. Organizations were required to submit a *Letter of Intent* and an *Application to Form a Village Center*. The formal EBMC guidelines for forming a Village Center included that each proposed organization:

- Be an aggregation of all communities in a specific geographic area;
- Agree to oversee Empowerment Zone Programs;
- Have at least 7,000 residents;
- Apply for/Have Received 501(c3) Status;
- Include representation from the following elements of the community: residents; organizations; associations; religious communities; schools; business entities; institutions; and government; and
- Show how they will plan and oversee required Village Center Empowerment Zone Action Items.

An interview with Michael Seipp, the coordinator of the City’s Empowerment Zone application process discussed how EBMC’s implementation of the Empowerment Zone differed from his interpretation of the original proposal in that EBMC emphasized the creation of entirely new community organizations while the initial vision for the program was that existing, larger organizations, such as the Southeast Community Organization (SECO); Communities Organized to Improve Life (COIL); and Community Building in Partnership would become the Village Centers in their service areas. The EBMC, and in many cases the individual communities’ decision, to create the Village Centers as new organizations rather than programs within larger organizations had important implications for both the creation and operation of the Village Centers. Village Centers would need to develop their own administrative and program implementation capacity rather than work through existing structures. From an operating perspective, new, independent, and smaller Village Center would have less independence from EBMC.

However, both Village Center representatives and EBMC staff and board members cited the need for new, community driven organizations. In the East Harbor Village Center focus group, considerable time was spent on a discussion of why a new organization needed to be formed, separate from SECO, who was perceived as not focused on addressing the needs of the African American community in Southeast Baltimore. One participant reported:

“SECO had always looked out for neighborhoods, lets say from Broadway going east [predominately white areas]. They never looked across the street to Chapel or Perkins [public housing projects]. SECO got federal grants to serve a mixture of neighborhoods, but they never filtered that money down to the African American communities.”

Key informants in the Self Motivated Community People’s Village Center raised similar concerns about having the existing Community Building in Partnership (CBP) organization, which coordinated the Enterprise Foundation-City redevelopment effort in the Sandtown-Winchester area, serve as the Village Center. There was a genuine belief among many segments of that community that the Sandtown-Winchester redevelopment effort “had been done to – not with – the community.” One key informant said:

“CBP was not made the Village Center because they [the residents driving the process] wanted a different entity. CBP is the City, the community residents and Rouse Company. And the history on that is that they came in and did what they wanted to do and we [the community] were not a part of it. In CBP the community piece is missing. They say it was there but it really wasn’t. So community residents were pissed on that.”

In fact the name of the Village Center – Self Motivated Community People’s Village Center was a direct response to some residents’ feelings that the Sandtown-Winchester redevelopment was externally driven. The new Village Center would be “Self Motivated” to address the need to change their own community.

The goal of creating new organizations to serve as Village Centers was also recognized at the EBMC staff and board member level. One EBMC Staff-Board Member focus group participant reported:

“From the beginning there was a common feeling at the board level, and I think it was justified, that if you gave to just – as it was structured at that point in time, 1995, if you allowed any lead organization, for example SECO –South East Community Organization which was an umbrella, if you give it to them to run, there will be no collective ownership for that. There will be none because that’s an existing organization and they always take the lead and so – so what? So there was a distinct effort to put into place new structures that would have a chance of involving all the communities that wished to get involved, and in a way putting a demand on the communities to get involved in order for the Village Centers to be created.”

The EBMC staff and board also explicitly recognized the difficulty entailed in the creation of new organizations, with one reporting:

“But you know, that’s [starting new organizations] the hardest way to do it. It’s the right way to do it, I really agree with that, but it’s the hardest because you’re starting from absolute ground zero. Nothing exists and you’ve got to try to bring all of these people together and somehow create a sense of organization there, which doesn’t exist at all, and you’ve mentioned the history of conflicts, and race, and all kinds – those are all the elements that were involved in trying to put these Village Centers together. And it is not surprising that it took years before they could be effective as any kind of community center.”

Thus, the EBMC community capacity building effort focused on the difficult task of building new Village Center organizations in five of six cases (HEBCAC was an existing organization). As a result, it is not surprising that all of the Village Centers reported having to overcome some level of barriers in the process for Village Center formation. The barriers identified can be divided into two categories:

1. Internal Barriers Within the Community – conditions in or characteristics of the community that needed to be overcome in order to form a Village Center; and
2. Process Barriers – or barriers created by the process for Village Center formation put in place by the Baltimore Empowerment Zone.

There was substantial interconnection between the internal community barriers and the process barriers. It is important to note that the Baltimore Empowerment Zone effort sought to promote the redevelopment and revitalization of some of Baltimore’s most distressed communities. These are often the communities with the lowest level of social cohesion or “social capital.” Many of these communities lacked or felt underserved by local community service organizations as well as by the political and economic power structure of the City. Many lacked a strong base of local support or mediating institutions. Thus, the Baltimore

Empowerment Zone sought to create entirely new capacity to serve communities facing severe social and economic distress and that often had only a limited local history of community action.

## **2.1 Internal Barriers Within the Community**

The communities targeted by the Baltimore Empowerment Zone were among the most distressed communities in the City. Distressed communities often lack core elements of local capacity – sometimes called social capital -- to control, implement or even adapt to change. Thus, it is not surprising that all of the communities reported some level of difficulties in organizing the community to form Village Centers. The lack of local capacity was explicitly raised at the Harlem Park focus group, where one participant concluded – “What you had was a community that wasn’t astute enough to understand the overall process of how you go about developing a plan from the ground and making it live.” This was even true of the Historic East Baltimore Community Action Coalition, the only case where a Village Center was formed as part of an existing community organization, where one key informant reported – “I think one of the huge challenges from an administrative perspective is that when we were HEBCAC, before we were Village Center, we had a staff of 5-6. We became a Village Center and within a matter of months we ballooned to a staff of 15 and there really was no preparation.” Not only did many of these communities lack existing capacity to implement the Empowerment Zone programs, they had to go through a difficult and conflict laden process to create a new organization. One Poppleton resident said they had to overcome “So many problems” most importantly “In-house fighting, neighborhood fighting, racial fighting.”

The core community-level barriers to Village Center formation were: controlling expectations; conflict over control/money; conflict over geography; conflict between community organizations; conflict with local institutions; racial conflict/class conflict; community leadership; and community history.

Controlling Expectations and Communications: was a critical issue raised by all of the Village Centers. In every Village Center, residents heard that \$100 million was going to be spent on programs and redevelopment efforts and thought that their communities and, in many cases, lives would change overnight. One participant in the EBMC Staff/Board Focus Group reported:

“I think it was cruel to put the hundred million dollars up there which, if it were in my bank account, I’d be very happy, but when its in 10 years’ worth of development of some of the most depressed areas in this City, when the school budget is \$1 billion a year, it’s peanuts. But you know, I really think it raised expectations cruelly among the residents.”

Another reported, “I remember hearing people say ‘you have all this money. How come something hasn’t changed yesterday?’” Every Village Center thought that they and EBMC should have done a better job of communicating how and what the money would be spent on and what residents could expect. One Harlem Park focus group participant reported, “The mandate of the Empowerment Zone concept wasn’t laid out in a manner that was understood by the everyday lay person.”

Conflict Over Control/Money: Not only did the Empowerment Zone raise expectations among the community, but it also attracted the interest of both people and organizations interested in either controlling the Village Center or the local money to be spent. East Harbor, Harlem Park, Poppleton, and Washington Village each reported conflicts between neighborhood residents

and/or organizations over control of the Village Center formation process or control over the organization and money. For example, Harlem Park reported:

“In my opinion, it [the money] drew some undesirable people [who wanted] to be in charge of the money or distributing the money. Undesirable people -- people with ulterior motives they had ideas in mind for self-advancement. It all came down to who was going to be in control of the process? Who was going to be the decision makers?”

Conflict Over Geography: Nearly every Village Center reported some level of conflict arising because of the definition for the geographic area to be served by the Village Center. In some cases, areas with only limited history of working together were put together – as was the case with SMPCVC – where the Penn North, Coppin Heights, Sandtown, and Southern Mondawmin neighborhoods were put together despite no real history of working together. In the case of the East Harbor Village Center, neighborhoods with a history of racial animosity -- for example between Little Italy and the major local housing projects -- were put together. In the case of Poppleton – there had long been a divide between residents living on the north and south sides of Baltimore Street – with the feeling expressed in the focus group that those residents from the southern part of the community preferred to be part of the Washington Village/Pigtown Village Center. In the case of HEBCAC, problems arose because the area served by the Village Center was only a portion of that organization’s overall, larger service area. In all of the Village Centers, problems arose because residents on one side of a street were often part of a different Village Center than friends, family or neighbors across the street, or even excluded from the Empowerment Zone altogether.

Conflict Between Community Organizations: Related to the issue of geographic boundaries was the issue of conflict between community organizations within each Village Centers’ service area. Many of the Village Center communities had pre-existing community organizations – ranging in size from small block associations to large umbrella organizations. Many of these organizations thought they should become or be in charge of the Village Center. Washington Village was successful in overcoming conflicts between three existing community organizations to engage them all in the process, in large part due to the efforts of institutional partners. In contrast, Poppleton was able to overcome the conflicts to begin operations, but was less successful in ultimately engaging all groups in its operations. As discussed above, both East Harbor and Self Motivated, were formed as community-based organizations in direct contrast to larger existing organizations that were either seen as non-responsive to the entire community (as with EHVC and SECO), or driven by outside interests (as with SMPCVC and CBP). In some cases, such as with SMPCVC, inter-organization conflicts were personality driven between the leaders of key organizations rather than between the organizations themselves.

Conflict With Local Institutions: Several of the Village Centers reported that conflicts between the community and dominant local institutions also impacted the Village Center formation process. Both the east and west portions of the Baltimore Empowerment Zone include major institutions, primarily universities and hospitals. There was often a strong local history of conflict between the local communities and these dominant institutions, most frequently on the East side. Most importantly with HEBCAC, but also in Poppleton, the Village Centers reported having to overcome some level of community mistrust over the participation and role of major institutions in the formation of Village Centers. On the other hand, in Washington Village, local institutions played a very positive role in the formation of the Village Center. That Village

Center benefited from the active participation of representatives from several institutions, including Head Start, Tri-Churches Housing, and University of Maryland, who brought both facilitation and organizational skills to the Village Center formation process. Community churches also brought organizational skills and capacity to the formation of Village Centers, especially in Harlem Park and Poppleton.

Racial Conflict/Class Conflict: Conflict between different racial and socio-economic groups also impacted the formation of Village Centers, especially in the more diverse communities of East Harbor and Washington Village, but also in Poppleton. Poppleton reported that the early meetings to create the Village Center were dominated by white residents:

“Before the Village Center actually formed we had all the meetings and ... the first time I’d gone down there and you probably wouldn’t have thought no African-Americans lived in Poppleton.” and “Well let me say that for you like this, there has always been a dividing line in this neighborhood, Baltimore Street. The majority of whites live on the south side and the blacks live on the north side. And so there’s always a fight, when it comes down to doing something for the neighborhood. And it seems that the whites thought that they should control the neighborhood. It’s that simple.”

Racial conflicts seemed to dominate the formation of the East Harbor Village Center. When asked what was the major barrier the Village Center had to overcome to form as a Village Center, one participant reported, “Racism was the top thing on the line because they didn’t want to accept it, they didn’t think that we had anything to bring to it as black people and it might not be what was said, but it was what was happening.” and “But what really angered me, was when we met at Herbert’s church and finally got everybody in the room, and the man from Little Italy stood up at the podium and just called us [racial epithet]. At that time my temper just went.”

Washington Village reported having to overcome both racial divisions and socio-economic divisions between long time residents and new residents – both African American and white – moving into the gentrifying parts of the community.

Community Leadership: The presence of strong local leadership was critical in the start-up of several Village Centers. HEBAC significantly benefited from having both a Board of Directors and a cadre of experienced professional staff that was hired to form the organization prior to the City’s designation as an Empowerment Zone. Thus, it did not experience the challenges associated with creating a new organization with a board of directors and staff experienced by other Village Centers. All other Village Centers benefited from the role of community leaders. In the case of East Harbor, a highly active local community leader led the Village Center formation process and went on to become the director of the Village Center. In Washington Village a committed group of residents and institutions led the formation process and went on to become the Board of Directors for the Village Center. Poppleton also benefited from the strong leadership of an individual who was involved in but did not reside in the community – who went on to become the Chairman of the Village Center board and Self Motivated was formed with the assistance of a group of community leaders, one of whom went on to run the Village Center, and the others who went on to control the Board.

While strong leadership benefited the process of Village Center formation, changes or a loss of leadership can set the process back. Harlem Park reported that the loss of a community leader who was serving as the focal point for the Village Center significantly hurt the formation

process, with one focus group participant reporting – “I remember that there was a lady who was chair of the board at that time but she really embodied a lot of positive things about what all this process would be. And she died out of the blue. And you know some of the vision and direction that she was providing was not available to us any longer.” Village Centers with strong, unbiased leadership – either at the staff or board level -- went on to form stronger organizations.

Community History: The efforts to form the Baltimore Empowerment Zone’s Village Centers were also significantly shaped by history of past redevelopment efforts and community issues. The history of conflict between the area’s largest institution –Johns Hopkins – and the community significantly impacted the development of the Village Center within HEBCAC. The formal funding relationship between HEBCAC and Johns Hopkins caused credibility problems with the local community. One person involved with HEBCAC put it this way, “HEBCAC should never have become fiscally tied to Johns Hopkins. It’s a credibility buster.” Harlem Park reported that residents never overcame the cynicism over past redevelopment efforts, “Urban renewal did a lot of damage in Harlem Park. We were the first Urban Renewal site in the nation and they did a lot of damage. They came in, they told us what they were going to do, they did it and they left. And they left us with whatever they left behind.”

Self-Motivated was formed as a Village Center separate and independent of the City and Enterprise Foundation’s Sandtown-Winchester redevelopment effort managed by Community Building in Partnership directly because of a feeling within the community and among the community leaders who formed the Village Center that this effort was not improving or involving the community. One person said, “The Enterprise Foundation was in this community since 1990 and they have not transformed this community – but they have taken \$70 million.” (The Enterprise Foundation used its own resources and generated substantial additional City, Federal and outside funding, but was seen by this person as ‘taking money’ that the community should have controlled). Another reported, “Residents of Sandtown-Winchester felt that outsiders were always coming in to tell them what to do. The money went to administration and housing not programs and the community thought all that money was wasted.”

## **2.2 Process Barriers**

In addition to facing community-level barriers to the formation of the Village Centers, each of the communities involved reported some level of difficulties having been created by the process required by EBMC for forming a Village Center. The most important process barriers to Village Center formation were the related issues of *the limited time* available to create Village Centers and *the lack of start-up financial, technical and other support* for the communities in the Village Center formation process. It is important to note, that time pressures for Village Center formation came both from above, from EBMC – who wanted to spend the money down in five years, and from below, from community residents who wanted to get started on improving their community. The Village Centers that were the first to begin operations were the ones who complained most about time pressures and the lack of technical assistance, with Village Centers that started later reporting fewer time related constraints and more success with technical assistance.

The issues of the time pressures and technical assistance were discussed most completely in the Washington Village focus group – the first Village Center approved by EBMC, where respondents reported:

“EBMC did nothing to protect the [Village Center formation] process, and they did nothing for a very long time to provide the technical assistance that was necessary for a board to learn how to be a board.”

“They [EBMC] just gave out this matrix, and said, ‘Go form a Village Center!’ and then they have about one page in there that said, ‘a Village Center should consist of a, b, c and d’ and when you get that together, submit it to me and we’ll let you know whether you are one or not.”

A Harlem Park focus group participant reported, “[EBMC provided technical assistance] after we got started. We were more or less left on our own to form as a Village Center.” The time constraints were also recognized at the EBMC staff and board level, where a focus group participant reported, “The heat was on from day one to get organized and get going.” and “We should probably have had a slower start up and much more attention focused on leadership and plans you could get a grip on.” Village Centers were caught in a catch 22, where they needed to be a formal 501(c3) organization to access EBMC funds – but needed funds to become an organization. Washington Village reported that they had to “pass the hat around to pay for incorporation because they [EBMC] wouldn’t release any money until you had your 501(c3)] designation.” The lack of funding and support in the Village Center formation process also caused logistical difficulties, for instance one Poppleton focus group participant reported, “I’ll start out by saying we had a whole lot of problems just finding some places to meet. We looked here there and everywhere.”

### **2.3 Strategies to Address Barriers**

All of the Village Centers were able to overcome the initial barriers to become functioning organizations. In doing so they relied on both internal and external resources and on technical assistance. Both Washington Village and HEBCAC relied more extensively on internal resources in the Village Center formation process, HEBCAC already had a professional staff and board in place, and Washington Village had a core group of committed board members who brought both skills and resources to the formation process. For example, in Washington Village there was substantial community conflict over the Village Center formation process and two developers were seen as trying to dominate the process to their benefit. In response, Board members with community organizing and outreach experience designed a board structure and by laws that would not allow any one group to dominate the process – “We conceptualized a strategy to create a board that would be big enough so that no single clique could dominate it and small enough that it wouldn’t be unwieldy.” They also devised an initial rotating chairmanship for the board so that no group could control it and more citizens could experience leadership. As a result of these internal resources, these were the first two Village Centers to begin operations.

All of the Village Centers reported using traditional community organizing to engage the community in the process. East Harbor, in particular, used an effective outreach process in the Village Center formation process and reported; “We had a person at Flag House, one at Chapel, and me representing Perkins. But one of the things we did right was that I didn’t just stay at Perkins. I was in Chapel, I was in Flag House, I went to Little Italy. Before the Hispanics even became the Hispanic Community they are today, I was already dealing with them.” The current East Harbor leadership also used grassroots community organizing to control the Village Center formation process—

“And the business that I really loved and, again I emphasize those numbers because everything went by vote, I’ll never forget those numbers. We had 200 strong in that room. Fells Point Business Association had about 45, so no matter what they did or said, they weren’t going to out vote us. And every time there was a meeting they tried to hide it, have secret meetings in places – but I was everywhere so no matter where the meeting was going to be, we were in the room.”

EBMC technical assistance was also viewed positively and as having assisted the Village Center process – especially among the Village Centers that had a longer start-up process. The assistance provided by the University of Maryland, Baltimore (through EBMC) – especially the legal assistance was viewed as critical in getting 501(c3) status. For example, Poppleton reported, “[The UMB volunteer lawyer] was very instrumental in helping us get started” as did Harlem Park. EBMC technical assistance was seen as critical in overcoming community conflict in East Harbor, where it was reported:

“I went to EBMC, told them what the problem was, they got a facilitator. We had two meetings. We had one at SECO – that was the planning session. Then we had a big meeting at Lombard Middle School and we invited everybody. And all I wanted them to see was the community – not color. The facilitator started and what happened was they forgot about color because they started talking about what does your community need.”

Harlem Park also reported that EBMC technical assistance was critical, “Yeah, we had technical training, board training early on. They [the TA providers] explained what a board was to do, what the organization was to do. .. So we were able, with that training, to get the center off the paper.”

### **3.0 Perceptions of Key Issues in Village Center Operations**

In the focus groups and interviews, key informants were asked to identify and discuss key issues impacting Village Center operations, what worked best and what did not work in each community, and what was the overall impact of the Empowerment Zone in each community.

#### **3.1 Key Issues in Village Center Operations**

In the focus groups and interviews, key informants were asked to identify and discuss key issues that impacted Village Center operations. This analysis focused on the operational issues impacting the core administrative functions of the Village Centers – not administrative functions impacting the operation of core programs – such as workforce development. Key operational issues can again be divided between internally driven issues – those issues within the Village Center or its community - and externally driven issues – or issues relating to the Village Centers relationship with EBMC, the City or other external stakeholders.

Key internal operational issues related to Village Center staffing, board relations, strategic planning, community mobilization activities, size, communications and community momentum. Key external issues focused on the relationship between the Village Centers and EBMC and the City. While there is substantial interaction between these internal and external, they are discussed separately below.

##### **3.1.1 Internal Operational Issues**

The key internal operational issues related to Village Center staffing, board relations, strategic planning, community mobilization activities, size, communications and community momentum.

Village Center Staffing: The strategies used to staff the Village Centers had significant impact on their operations. The Village Centers are located in many of the City’s poorest and most disadvantaged communities. As such, they often lack local residents or leaders with the formal skills and training necessary to create and run an organization. One Poppleton key informant reported - “Finding, training, and retaining staff was a problem. And basically, the problems that were identified in retaining and finding a staff was the fact that so many had specific barriers themselves.”

Some Village Centers – for example East Harbor – focused on hiring and training local leadership and had significant success in developing new community leadership. Others, like HEBCAC, Poppleton and Washington Village tried to hire local leadership, but often hired from outside of the community for key management positions. Some Harlem Park key informants reported success in hiring local residents – “What I can say and what makes me proud of this center is that the residents who actually lived here in Harlem Park ended up being employed by the center, gave the services. So that’s one thing that made us really, in my opinion, outstanding from many other centers.” However, another key informant reported –

“We tried to use our community people but it was a disadvantage to us because we picked our ED from the community thinking that we have somebody who was good. It took them like 1.5 – 2 years to realize all his training and stuff, he didn’t have good management procedures. He could not manage and still doesn’t know how to manage. But I found out that became a handicap for the board because by everybody on the board knowing him, knows what his talents and capabilities are when because of situations where it came time to really do what was necessary to

be done, when he had to removed, they didn't want to do that. Give him another chance, Give him another chance..."

Hiring local residents, however, is a critical issue – especially in the community outreach and mobilization areas. As reported by an East Harbor key informant, “In order to start moving and getting people interested in what the Village Center has to offer, you had to hire community people.”

Determining salary levels can also be difficult, as most executive directors require salaries substantially higher than the earnings of most community residents. Washington Village and Self Motivated reported having to overcome Board-level conflicts over the salaries paid to executive directors.

Several Village Centers – Poppleton, Washington Village, and, more recently HEBCAC, have been impacted by staff turnover and long-term vacancies in key positions. This loss of leadership can have significant implications on the operations of a Village Center, for example HEBCAC lost most of its senior management in a six-month period and was forced to operate with an interim director at a key period as the City was planning a major East Side redevelopment effort. Washington Village, on the other hand, was able to overcome problems with staffing turnover and vacancies, primarily because of the strength of its Board.

There was also some level of problems associated with how the Village Centers' professional staff and board members related to board members and the larger community. Many community residents reported that more educated staff and board members undervalued the contributions of community residents, many of whom had lower levels of formal education.

“I don't put a whole lot into the degrees. Because I've been in this neighborhood 50 years on one corner, and I have been from the mountaintop to the basement and the people I'd rather be around with are the ones who hocked their degree to get common sense.” Poppleton

“They [more educated staff and board members] talk about all this stuff and I can't vote because I don't know what they are talking about. They use the initials and this or that and we don't know.” Washington Village

Village Center/Board Relationships: There were substantial variations in the level of board activity and control among the Village Centers. East Harbor is an example of a staff-led organization while Washington Village was more of a board-led organization. Poppleton was an example of an organization where a key board member played a dominant role. The Self Motivated board was dominated by a smaller group of key board members working together, with some other people reporting that they felt excluded from the decision-making. This caused conflict among, delayed implementation, and in effect splintered the board. Just about every Village Center has reported some level of difficulty in developing and maintaining a Board of Directors. The difficulties experienced ranged from managing the operations of the board, to engaging board members in the management process, to balancing the organization strength and responsibilities of various board members.

East Harbor, Harlem Park, and Poppleton all reported some level of difficulty in engaging their respective boards in Village Center operations, maintaining a quorum at meetings, or having the board take an active role in operations.

“Recently, I’ve had a problem with maintaining a Board. And I’d say in the past two years most of the board members have moved out of the area. Some have moved out, some of them from organizations, or have changed function.” East Harbor

“Our Village Center did not have a quorum for the board. Let me tell you how they operated. With one of the previous chairperson, they would claim they had an executive session, they did not call it and what they were doing was that they were running around to certain people’s houses when they wanted to get something done who was on the executive committee and telling them to vote for this, vote for that, things like that. They just did things. There wasn’t closure.” Harlem Park

“Keeping the board working has been a struggle. The executive committee of the board has remained intact and very strong and active, and then a few of the community organizations have as well.” Poppleton

Some Village Centers reported problems with their boards getting organized and directing or managing operations.

“First of all the meetings were taking too long, what’s the agenda, they may have had an agenda but they did not stick with it.” And “They would rehash, overhash, they don’t get anything accomplished. I’m a person here where we are and let’s refocus. But in the first few meeting I didn’t, but after a while, I had to say something, I can’t just sit there and waste my time and other people’s time. Some people stopped coming into the meetings.” Self-Motivated

Village Centers also reported problems in maintaining the appropriate roles for board members vis-à-vis the organization. One Self-Motivated key informant reported - “[One board member] wanted to micromanage the staff. He came to that Village Center everyday as if it was his office, that was not his job, he was a board member.” When board members turned over, especially in the case of conflicts, the Village Centers also often lost access to the information collected by exiting board members – as reported by a Harlem Park key informant -- “When board members and chairs left they didn’t pass on all of the information to new members or chairs. It was like ‘I’m going to hold this and this person ain’t going to know.’”

As presented below, EBMC played a major role in assisting the Village Centers in addressing board related issues through technical assistance.

Strategic Planning: All of the Village Centers were required to develop a land-use plan by EBMC and many – HEBCAC and Washington Village -- also developed their own long-term strategic plans. These plans not only guided the efforts of the Village Centers, but also through charettes and public meetings served as a means of mobilizing community engagement with the Village Centers. Nearly every Village Center considers the land-use plans to be one of the most important things produced by the Baltimore Empowerment Zone, and despite being five or more years old, most still guide their Village Centers’ operations today. Washington Village reported, “I think it’s [the land use plan] important as a road map, because with the outside investors moving in if we didn’t have that we would be at the mercy of [the developers].” Harlem Park reported “the land use plan -- that probably was the only thing, in my opinion, that probably brought us together more than anything else.” Some Village Centers think, however, that more

planning would have been beneficial during the Village Center formation process – most importantly a thorough needs assessment of each community.

Community Mobilization: All of the Village Centers reported difficulties in mobilizing and engaging the community in Village Center operations. Several Village Centers reported that the Empowerment Zone under invested in community organizing. One Washington Village key informant reported:

“It was hard to get people to come to meetings – then they cry that their area is getting left out. There was apathy in Washington Village towards the EZ – but rich community life under this apathy. The Empowerment Zone under invested in community organizing.”

Even HEBCAC, which at its peak had four or five community organizers reported difficulty in overcoming community apathy and mobilizing the community. HEBCAC reported difficulty in engaging the community who had a history of distrust of Johns Hopkins University, who was a funder of HEBCAC. One HEBCAC key informant reported, “Well HEBCAC should never become fiscally tied to Johns Hopkins. It is a credibility buster, it continues to be a credibility buster. It puts staff in a no win position.” Other Village Centers reported problems in getting community organizations to work with the Village Center, as reported in the following quotes:

“With any group, they will come if there’s something for them or that they need. With any group that I’ve worked with where they should have been part of the Village Center that has been the pattern. They only come if it’s in their interest, and they don’t participate otherwise.” East Harbor

“I got this impression that you got all these communities and all these organizations and don’t nobody know what this community does or that community does. I’m just saying nobody knows their roles and then when you get these organizations and these groups, nobody wants to work together but you’ve got everybody who wants to be in charge.” Harlem Park

Communications: More effective communications could have assisted the efforts at mobilizing the community. Most Village Centers produced newsletters, but they were produced irregularly. The Village Centers also publicized their meetings but often had low turnout. Even with better communications, many Village Center key informants – such as this person associated with Harlem Park, reported how difficult it was to get community participation.

“But you know what I think it all boils down to, one of the barriers is we did not have and still don’t have total community awareness of what’s going on. I think the community has been informed but I can agree that the community as a whole has been reluctant and slow to come to the table to take part in the overall process. But as far as getting the word out, I think we did an excellent job at getting the word out about the programs that are offered here at the Village Center.”

Size: The size of the communities served also impacted efforts to mobilize their respective communities. In the year 2000, the Empowerment Zone portion of HEBCAC had a population of 18,351. One HEBCAC key informant reported, “I think it might have been too big for – I think it was too big for them to really get the things done that should have been done.” On the other hand, Harlem Park had a population of 4,283 in the year 2000 and also had pre-existing community organizations – such as Harlem Park

Revitalization. This Village Center many have been too small to support a Village Center in addition to existing organizations. Furthermore, despite the small size of Harlem Park, the Village Center failed to reach out to the whole community and didn't effectively engage the area's important faith-based community.

Community Momentum and Institutions: Village Centers serving a larger, diversified community, experiencing some level of redevelopment, and/or having major institutions were able to form stronger organizations. Both East Harbor and Washington Village are in the natural path of Baltimore's waterfront and downtown-driven redevelopment. This provided both internal and external supports to building stronger organizations. Redevelopment provides internal mechanisms to support organizational capacity building as community residents see either defensive (protection from gentrification) or positive (things are starting to change) reasons to become involved. Redevelopment provides external mechanisms to support organizational capacity building as the City power structure – agencies or developers – need to work with local organizations as part of the public participation component of redevelopment efforts. External funders, such as foundations, see and feel that they can make more of a difference in a changing community. As reported by East Harbor, “Another issue is the unique development opportunities along the waterfront that were part of these boundaries, which was different from any other Village Center. The big powers, the Struever Brothers, Paterakis -- the people in control were a factor in this Village Center.” Also, for example, Poppleton has reported both a stronger working relationship with University of Maryland, Baltimore now that they are building a research park in the Village Center and that more residents and neighborhood organizations are working with the Village Center -- “Certain segments left [the Village Center] until the University of Maryland piece [research park] came up, and now people are coming back.”

Key institutional partners can also support the creation of stronger organizations. Such support can be monetary - for example HEBCAC received a substantial base of its funding from Johns Hopkins and the City and never relied on the Empowerment Zone for more than one-third of its funding – or simply in the form of other resources and contacts, as was the case of Washington Village where a benign institutional presence on the board provided access to both organizational skills and programmatic funding. However, as the case of HEBCAC demonstrates, ties to a dominant local institution can cause mistrust among community residents. Communities lacking a local economic base or institutional presence can be at a disadvantage in building strong community organizations, as was reported by one EBMC Staff/Board key informant – “Harlem Park actually suffered a double whammy. Not only were they small, but they had no institutional partners and they had no business district.”

### **3.1.2 External Operational Issues**

The key external Village Center operational issues related to their relationships with EBMC and the Baltimore City government.

The Village Centers reported mixed responses on their relationship with EBMC. A core complaint about EBMC was that it created an *over-centralized process* that limited the Village Center's freedom and flexibility. One person involved with the EBMC application process reported:

“My premise is that the Empowerment Zone should have been 6 laboratories to test creative ways of community development, service delivery, management of City obligatory services, like education, and the partnership entities, which included government institutions and neighborhood residents. And what it became was as a central entity that established the rules and regulations for how employment development was going to be structured, for how use services is to be structured, and how housing would be structured.”

In the Village Center formation process, EBMC established a set list of programs that each Village Center was supposed to implement. As a result, Village Centers felt that EBMC dictated the core programmatic goals of the Village Centers rather than allow each to set its own programmatic goals, as demonstrated by the following opinions expressed in the focus groups or interviews:

“EBMC has dictated programmatic thrust and really controlled how far the Village Center can go.”

“Once EBMC became the absolute authoritarian parent of the Village Centers then attempts to be flexible and creative at the grassroots level were stifled and that’s what happened.”

“We were going wherever there was [EBMC] money, so we were reinventing ourselves based on what money was there instead of knowing who we were and staying true to that vision.”

“I don’t think we had the flexibility. ... ‘what do we got to do to get our administrative funding again?’ Lets go back to the core – which is administrative funding – to keep things going.”

The EBMC staff and Board recognized that EBMC as an organization did establish the overall programmatic goals for the Empowerment Zone and the Village Centers. In the EBMC Staff/Board focus group, one key informant reported –

“When the application went in there was every good thing in the world in that application. And there was no way in the world that those good things could all be achieved. And so a decision had to be made pretty early on where we were going to put the focus. And that may have been a different focus from people in the Village Centers, many of whom probably worked on the application and saw different things in it. And this board made a decision that we are going to focus on job creation, workforce development, and the things that impact employment.”

EBMC was very clear that it focused its efforts on a core set of programs and goals identified by its board. EBMC representatives responded to this criticism by pointing out: 1) that the Village Center’s were represented on both the Board and Advisory Council, and thus, knew about and were able to shape these core programs and goals; and 2) EBMC both encouraged and assisted the Village Centers to set their own goals and seek additional support to implement non-EZ goals and programs.

Several Village Centers reported that EBMC had a “*very parental*” *management relationship* with the Village Centers. This led to some level of conflicts with the Village Centers. For example, Village Centers reported:

“I think they [EBMC] could have been more open with us. In fact, every time we go down there to get our draw down, we got to go down there, like begging. I ain’t never liked that.”

“We had to fight them [EBMC] more than we had to fight the neighborhood. That was who we all were fighting against.” “Everything we did was wrong. Everything we sent them they lost it.”

Some Village Centers resented the power differential between EBMC and the Village Centers – “We had second hand furniture ... they had cherry wood desks they got too much of the money.” There was also a feeling among some Village Centers that *EBMC did not reward success* but rather forced equality among Village Centers. For example, one key informant reported when Washington Village used up its Housing Venture Fund allocation they had to stop to let the other Village Centers catch up, “Washington Village used up all of its allocation for the Housing Venture fund and couldn’t get more. And now there is still money that hasn’t been spent, because all other Village Centers didn’t do their job. And you know – that where I think – I know EBMC was trying to be fair to all the Village Centers, but rather than rewarding success, they kind of held the Village Center back to keep pace with those that weren’t as successful.” While this forced equality was evident in program design, during program implementation, EBMC did allocate additional resources to this program on a first come, first served basis. Overall, while many Village Centers reported difficulties in dealing with EBMC, they maintained a *positive view of its leadership and staff*.

Another key operational issue was *the time allotted* for the Village Center formation and operation process. One key informant said “the Baltimore Empowerment Zone was running an sprint not a marathon.” The initial goal for the Baltimore Empowerment Zone was to spend down the federal money in five years. As a result the Village Centers felt significant time pressure to get established and begin running EBMC programs. As a result, many Village Centers reported that they *could not spend sufficient time on planning, building capacity or efforts to enhance sustainability*. As reported in the HEBCAC focus group:

“I am not sure anybody had an organizational design for what this [Village Centers] was supposed to be and everybody had to learn through their own supply of errors. And by the time that we learned – you know – the time was up – the funding was over – but it wasn’t really a funding issue it was a time issue.”

Because the Village Centers drew their Board and much of their staff from the local communities, which were poor and disadvantaged, there was a substantial need for training and technical assistance to provide the skills necessary to create and run a new organization. As a result, EBMC played a critical role in supporting the start-up and operation of the Village Centers through *training and technical assistance*. All Village Centers reported that EBMC training and technical assistance had a positive impact.

“The board had several retreats to assist them in handling operating issues of the board. That was very positive.” Poppleton

“We had technical training, board training early on. They [the TA providers] explained what a board was to do, what the organization was to do. ... So we were able, with that training, to get the center off the paper.” Harlem Park.

The core criticism of the technical assistance effort was that all Village Centers did not take sufficient advantage of it. One-Washington Village key informant reported, “The [technical assistance] money was there but I don’t think the board and/or the staff necessarily knew to ask for certain things. I don’t think we knew what to ask for.” Several HEBCAC key informants reported that they also could have benefited more from technical assistance – but they might not have asked for it or received it because they were a larger-better funded organization than the other Village Centers. It is important to note that the directors and board chairs of all Village Centers were notified of the technical assistance resources – both funding and pre-approved consultants – available. Part of the problem in the technical assistance effort appears to be with the turnover of Village Center staff and leadership coupled with a lack of transfer of information between old and new leadership. However, this again points to the important need for continual information dissemination.

Overall there was a tension in the Empowerment Zone’s technical assistance efforts. The Village Centers that experienced the most problems reported that they wish EBMC had stepped in earlier. However, EBMC wanted the Village Centers to solve their own problems.

“Some people have said ‘EBMC should come in [to the Village Center] and make this right.’ And what we say is ‘If your not violating your bylaws, you’re not violating criminal law, you’re not violating any federal mandate or your funding agreement – then maybe this is the situation that you’re unhappy with a decision that your Village Center is making, and you need to muster support among your colleagues to move that in a different direction.’”

EBMC saw itself as a grantor agency to the Village Centers – with one Board member reporting:

“It got clearer to me. As I was here a few years, that we were really the grantor agency and we should function as such. And we provided a lot of things that other grantors don’t provide. But certainly our primary focus was to make sure that those things the Village Centers agreed to in their Administrative Funding Agreement were accomplished. So we tried not to step into communities and impose our will. We simply said ‘you have a Village Center and we drove people back to the Village Center.’”

As part of their relationships with EBMC, each of the Village Centers was required to set and report progress toward meeting annual goals as a condition of the EBMC administrative funding. Surprisingly, most Village Centers did not consider the *evaluation and reporting requirements* set by EBMC as a problem.

Most Village Centers did not see City government as an ally in the community capacity building efforts of the Empowerment Zone. Many key informants reported that they felt there was an effort by City agencies to take over the core programs that were to be implemented by the Empowerment Zone and the Village Centers. Furthermore, as demonstrated in the following quotes, there was a feeling in the Village Centers that the City did not meet its responsibilities when it was in charge of programs or needed to make investments or actions to support the Empowerment Zone – this is especially true of the public safety, housing demolition and redevelopment, and housing exterior repair programs.

“DHCD was doing what they call scattered-site demolitions and you see it now. You walk down a block and in the midst of it will be a clear lot where one house was in such disrepair that, under Mr. Henson, they just took it out. I think it finally came to everybody’s awareness that neither scattered site renovation nor scattered site demolition leads to big development or development hardly at all.”

“The officer sat here for years, sitting on the front step looking at prostitution and drugs right down the alley and wouldn’t do a goddamn thing about it.”

“They gave it [exterior repair] to the City and then they let the City develop its guidelines, where it wasn’t supposed to be like that. ... And they changed it to make it a loan.”

City politics also impacted the success of the Village Centers, especially on the East Side of Baltimore, because as one key informant reported, “East Side and West Side politics are a bit different. East side, they [the politicians] really control – you have a small group controlling everything. In West Baltimore, you have a lot of different groups.” The West Side Village Centers reported that City politics played a minor supportive role in the creation and operation of the Village Centers with Harlem Park reporting having the most cooperative relationship with local political leaders. On the East side, HEBCAC was in many ways a creation of the political power structure in that part of the City, and this benefited the Village Center in the form of both program funding and administrative support, especially in the early days of the Empowerment Zone. However, with the change in administration, the Village Center’s cooperative relationship with the City changed and the City created a competing organization to manage its East Side redevelopment efforts. One key informant reported,

“When Martin O’Malley was elected, HEBCAC leadership tried to meet them. Here is our plan, we want you to understand what our plan is, and we want you to be on board. He basically would refuse to meet. ... At that point, the City’s participation in everything we were doing disappeared. We used to have weekly meetings with City agencies. Gone. They just stopped meeting with us.”

In fact, one key informant reported the entire relationship between the Village Centers and the City changed after the election – “Schmoke assisted the Empowerment Zone because it was his baby. O’Malley – he knew nothing about Empowerment. O’Malley didn’t care about Empowerment.”

### **3.2 What Worked Best and What Did Not Work**

When asked to identify the most important Baltimore Empowerment Zone programs, there was general agreement among the Village Centers that the workforce development programs were both most important and worked best (See Table 1).<sup>1</sup> Substance abuse was generally perceived as the second most important program. Several of the Village Centers identified public safety as an important program and Harlem Park and Washington Village

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<sup>1</sup> The list of the programs that worked best was determined through a facilitated dialogue in the focus groups. Since interviews – not a focus group was held in the Self Motivated community, it was not possible to determine an ordered list of the most important programs. However, because the Workforce Development program continued to operate even after the focus group was closed, key informants tended to identify this programs as the most important.

considered it a success. Both HEBCAC and Poppleton considered public safety programs as important – but only successful when they were funded. When the funding ran out, crime problems returned.

**Table 1**  
**Most Important Empowerment Zone Programs**

EHVC	HPLSVC	HEBCAC
Workforce Development	Workforce Development	Workforce Development
Substance Abuse	Substance Abuse	Substance Abuse
Economic Development – The creation of CDC/Property Acquisition	Public Safety Community Organizing	Public Safety - Worked when it had Money. Stopped When it Ran out
Poppleton	WVPNPC	
Workforce Development	Public Safety	
Substance Abuse	Workforce Development	
Public Safety - good then stopped	Main Streets	
Creating a CDC – Acquiring the Parren Mitchell Building	Housing Venture Fund	
Housing Venture Fund		
Block by Block		

There was no general consensus on the programs that did not work or were not important. A general trend in the discussion pointed out that when City agencies were involved or controlled program implementation – as was the case with public safety, housing redevelopment, and the Home Improvement Program – the programs were less successful than when EBMC or the Village Centers ran the program. The public safety programs of the Empowerment Zone were an area in particular where City control over the process led to mixed results. Some Village Centers reported the programs were successful, others reported significant problems. HEBCAC reported having a strong working relationship with the Police Department – who were “Incredibly supportive of everything we did.” However, HEBCAC also reported that its strong positive relationship with the Police Department was related to its success in attracting outside public safety funding.

“We brought several hundred thousands a year (from the Federal government) to the police department. We had the negotiating pull. We were also willing to do things that other Village Centers basically didn’t have capacity to do.”

Other Village Centers much reported much less success with the City’s public safety effort, as demonstrated by the following quotes:

“Why did the public safety initiative stop? I am not going to say it stopped from the police department because they didn’t do nothing to start with but come in and use our telephone and our papers and ride around in our van. They sent the type of policeman that should have already been retired. An old guy, just old and should have been retired. You know how they keep the old police lying around the station house.” Poppleton

“[Our plan was to] get small, mobile vans that can move down an alley, and if we can park them somewhere, manned by police officers, social workers, peoples from the Village Center ... we can take back a street. What happened was ... when the Police Department got hold of the funds for it they started to think in terms of vehicles that could be used for major events that could be put on television. So they bought 37 foot long vans that couldn’t fit down the alleys. They wouldn’t allow the community to use them. So there was no 24-7 presence and the things became ceremonial and useless.” Washington Village

Despite problems in implementation, public safety programs were considered to be successful by several of the Village Centers. Still, it is important to note that the Empowerment Zone communities had among the highest crime rates in the City and making significant changes in such high crime areas is difficult and takes time. According to one key informant associated with HEBCAC:

“We got a Community Policing grant? We were trying to build on that to do some other programs. I mean if you look at the crime statistics in the area where we were working, we were reducing crime in the area that we were targeting 15-18% a year. Now the problem was the crime rate was so high that with an 18% reduction it would take a 5 – 10 year sustained program to actually significantly make a difference. But you also had to have the cooperation of the police department.”

### **3.3 What was the Overall Impact of the Empowerment Zone**

There is a broad based consensus among the people that participated in the focus groups or were interviewed that the overall impact of the Empowerment Zone was positive for their communities.<sup>2</sup> As described above, *workforce development* was considered to be the most important impact of the Empowerment Zone. A Harlem Park focus group participant reported, “EBMC’s goal was to get people in jobs, well then we’ve succeeded because that’s what we do best here.” An EBMC Board member reported – “Where they took somebody who had this [low – hand gesture] skill level and we did job training and all the sudden they got up to that point for a real job, and that was absolutely the right thing to do.”

Several Village Centers focused on the many *community capacity building* impacts of the Baltimore Empowerment Zone as important overall outcomes. Overall EBMC engaged the community in the change process, built organizations to represent their community with the City power structure, and created local leadership. EBMC was seen as creating a means to engage the entire community in the program, as reported in the following quotes:

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<sup>2</sup> The major dissention from this view was among persons from Self Motivated who supported the job placement efforts of the Empowerment Zone, but reported that because the closure of their Village Center, other EBMC programs, such as housing and public safety, really didn’t have as great an impact in their community.

“When we talk about EBMC, one of the things they did right was, if you look at the other Empowerment Zones around the County, the government took over and spent all the money in three years. The people, the communities, really didn’t have a lot of involvement. ... But here we did have community involvement in the process. So you have to give them their props for that.” Poppleton

“HEBCAC provides a forum for the institutions, government, businesses, and residents to meet in a relatively balanced forum to exchange ideas and find solutions that everybody can live with.” HEBCAC

“I would say that one of the most successful things really is the relationships that the staff here have developed with community residents. That is what created the successful initiatives.” Washington Village

Both East Harbor and Poppleton focused on how the Baltimore Empowerment Zone gave their communities the capacity to become involved in key redevelopment project occurring in their communities – as demonstrated by the following two quotes:

“We tried to partner with them [the developers], knowing that they are so big, and so large, and so influential, that the deals were going to happen. So the question is, how could we participate in the deals so low income people could participate in all this economic wealth? So the way we did it over time, was to get a role in the urban renewal process because we – because of the Village Center’s mission, we were bringing people together anyway. So we tried to be the leadership organization.” East Harbor

“I think the best thing the Village Center did was to negotiate and work with [University of] Maryland to actually have Maryland become a part of this community. People talk about the ‘wall’ the dividing wall that divides the University of Maryland from Poppleton. And I think that we built a door in the wall that allowed the University of Maryland to come through and say ‘hey you have land, we have money you have human capital we have money, You have labor, we have money. That was something that just never happened, because if it did, they’d be over here. I mean where they are building at now, that place was vacant for 20 years. I think that UM was able to work with the community because this board represents various segments of this community. So I think in the past they probably thought they couldn’t work with the community.”

Poppleton

EBMC also created local leadership to effect change at the community level, as demonstrated by the following quotes:

“The Village Center helped develop new leadership -- not the same old people. It has helped to build trust inside people that had never been in the table before. Despite all the arguing and everything else, I think it helped build the camaraderie of the community so you know where to go.” Washington Village

“Leadership – that’s your building capacity right there. You can’t build nothing unless you’ve got a community. You got to look at the community and you got to look at what’s needed.” East Harbor

Despite the problems, several Village Centers mentioned improved public safety as a key impact of the Empowerment Zone.

“Public safety was important. I’ll use this building as an example. When we first occupied this building at Carey and Edmondson, as an employee we literally had to walk a gauntlet to get into our building because the building – the corners belonged to the drug dealers. ... Where now, as you can see the corners are quite clear out there, during working hours at least. ... Something as simple as that makes a world of difference to a resident.” Harlem Park

“You know, before I got involved with this, when it first came, I thought ‘they’re not going to do anything.’ So finally, I got on the board and then I was wondering what they were going to do. ... I became the co-chair of public safety and we’ve been moving ever since and the crime went down. Heck brother, I loved that.” Washington Village

Finally, many focus group participants identified the local availability integrated services as the most important impact of the Empowerment Zone. Most federal, state or City programs are not offered at the community level. Persons who need multiple services – such as substance abuse counseling and job training – must often go to multiple service providers outside of their communities. The Baltimore Empowerment Zone brought integrated services into the community. Many of the Village Centers reported that linking the substance abuse programs with the employment and training programs was vitally important in order to serve their communities. It was also possible to link the workforce development program to the housing development program so that the people receiving training stay in the community. The Village Centers also served as a clearing house for referring residents to other programs they might need, with one Harlem Park resident reporting, “What worked best was the compassion. Overall, you could walk in here and get the information and resources on just about anything that you needed assistance with. There are people that work here that truly care about the community.”

## 4.0 Baltimore Empowerment Zone Community Capacity Building Lessons Learned

A core goal of this analysis was to identify key issues that impacted and the core lessons that can be learned from the community capacity building efforts of the Baltimore Empowerment Zone. In the interviews and focus groups, key informants were asked to identify – based on their experience – what the Village Centers or EBMC could have done differently in order to improve the efforts to build community development capacity. The key informants also identified several ways in which the programs implemented by the Baltimore Empowerment Zone could have been more effective.

### 4.1 What Could EBMC Have Done Differently

The Village Center and EBMC staff and board key informants identified several key issues that EBMC could have done to improve the community capacity building efforts. These can be divided into things EBMC could have done *internally* to the capacity building process in terms of its relationship with the Village Centers and *externally* to the capacity building process in terms of its relationship with the larger, City power structure.

Key *internal factors* included:

Create a More Structured, Longer Timeframe for the Village Center Process: The initial goal was for EBMC to spend down its money in five years. As a result, there was considerable time pressure created to get up and running. One East Harbor key informant reported – “In the original application should have been 10 years, not 5. You are looking at a miracle in five years. I don’t know how they expect for this to be done in five years.” As one EBMC Board/Staff key informant reported - “The heat was on from day one to get organized and get going.” As a result, the process of forming the Village Centers was rushed and this rush did not allow sufficient time for initial, planning, community mobilization and capacity building efforts. The overall process could have been improved if the start-up time had been extended for the Village Centers, with one EBMC Board/Staff key informant reporting - “We should probably have had a slower start up and much more attention focused on leadership and plans you could get a grip on.” Another EBMC Board/Staff key informant suggested that the entire first year of the effort should have been devoted to planning and capacity building. One East Harbor key informant reported, “EBMC should have started up all the Village Centers at the same time. There should have been training. After you submitted your application there should have been training with all the Village Centers, if you started them up at the same time.” A Harlem Park key informant reported that if they had “up front mentoring and facilitating” they might have avoided many of the problems they experienced. When asked what EBMC could have done differently, one Washington Village key informant reported – “Capacity building. Capacity building wasn’t up front. What was up front to EBMC was jobs and ‘get the thing [Village Center] formed. But they didn’t do the infrastructure.” And that a “Slower start would have a bigger impact in the end.”

More Cooperative Process with Village Centers: A core criticism of EBMC was that the EBMC-Village Center relationship was over centralized. The Village Centers thought that improved opportunities for interaction and cooperation among the Village Centers – such as the federation of Village Centers – would have allowed for sharing of knowledge and experiences among the Village Centers, may have reduced inter-Village Center rivalry for funding, and would have given the Village Centers a stronger voice with EBMC. One key informant reported – “I think it [the Village Center Federation] would have really balanced and allowed communication to continue to flow between the Village Centers and created a balance with EMBC. As it was, what

happened was that the advisory board that was set up became the place where that communication attempted to happen.” But as reported in the EBMC Staff/Board Focus Group the Advisory Council served more as means for EBMC to communicate with the Village Centers rather than the Village Centers to communicate among themselves.

Many Village Centers also reported that EBMC could have both listened to and allowed greater programmatic independence at the Village Center level. One Poppleton key informant reported - “I would say come sit down and talk to us and find out what we actually needed. They [EBMC] sit back and dictate to the Village Center what to do. They should come out in the community. They’re the ones that got all the money, and all power and see what’s going on.” Other Village Centers reported that EBMC did not allow flexibility in how money could be used. For example, East Harbor reported – “EBMC too restrictive in how the money could be used. “EBMC should have looked at is some creative ways in which the dollars could be used, because we came to them with a lot of opportunities for sustainability, but their excuse was that the dollars couldn’t be used.” In response, EBMC reported that some of these requests were not permitted under the federal guidelines and thus, they could not do them.

Better Communications Process: A core issue among the Village Centers was that EBMC needed a better method to communicate with the Village Centers. Several Village Centers reported that one of the reasons they did not take advantage of the effective technical assistance and training resources available from EBMC was a lack of knowledge about what was available. For example, one Harlem Park key informant reported – “There were times where there were moneys available that we didn’t know of as a board and came to know about later.” Better public communications from EBMC could also have helped the Village Centers control the expectations of community residents. As one EBMC board/staff key informant reported – “Lack of communication – that’s what caused the rift [between the Empowerment Zone and the community]. I mean a lot of people just don’t know what EBMC is about. You know when you try to explain it, because of the misconceptions, it falls on deaf ears.” Part of the problem with the communications process had to do with information transmission from the EBMC Advisory Council, where the Village Centers were represented, and the Village Centers themselves. EBMC reported that it both informed and vetted decisions through the Advisory Council. However, Advisory Council turnout was often low and EBMC found that Village Center Advisory Council representatives often did not report back to their organizations or boards on the key issues before or decisions of the Council.

Earlier Emphasis on Sustainability: In the Washington Village focus group one key informant reported, “EBMC should have helped all of the Village Centers set up infrastructures that would be sustainable down the road and help them figure out how they were going to raise non-EBMC funds from the beginning.” To which another key informant responded – “Even if they had just forced our hand and said ‘in order to get our money – you have to do a match.’” One East Harbor Key informant reported, “The sustainability issue is mainly about the relationship with the foundations. And I think that is where EBMC really could have helped us out earlier, in terms of getting that relationship with the foundations, so that by this time, you know, the relationships would be there, the confidence, and the trust would be there in terms of the foundation community and us.”

The key *external factor* was that EBMC should have built stronger partnerships with key external change agents – most importantly City agencies, foundations, and businesses. In the EBMC staff/board focus group, the issue that many City agencies made pledged to assist in the

Empowerment Zone effort and did not follow through with key promises, most importantly in the area of housing development. One EBMC staff/board key informant reported:

“Baltimore was one of those cities that I think the housing department pulled out of a major initiative that could have changed communities. And with EBMC’s strategy, we could now probably have the 10 years later, at least the beginning of real communities of choice – if the housing piece had been in place. And if the foundation community had participated as they said they would have in the capacity building side.”

Another EBMC staff/board key informant discussed how the business community did not make any major contributions to the Empowerment Zone effort – “There was no contribution from the business community. And that you know, that could have been – it would have taken some real doing. It would have to come early on, but you know if the business community could have been mobilized behind this, you’re talking about significant amounts of money.” Local foundations as well could have been brought into the process earlier. While the foundation community met the investment obligations set in the EZ application, this support tended to be focused on the core areas of foundation interest, such as education, rather than community capacity building or operating support to the Village Centers. As was reported in the EBMC Strategic Planning Retreat, many foundations viewed the Empowerment Zone communities as already ‘being assisted’ and did not make complimentary investments in the Village Centers.

#### **4.2 What Could The Village Centers Have Done Differently**

The Village Centers focused on a stronger community outreach effort, expanding internal and external networks, better board management, an earlier emphasis on sustainability and standing up to EBMC as the key things they would do differently.

Stronger Community Outreach: Village Centers reported that a larger investment in community organizing was necessary, for example a Washington Village key informant reported, “We needed a steward in each of the area initiatives. We should have had a community organizer in each committee.” A core component of improved community outreach was seen as stronger communications efforts to explain the Village Center and the Empowerment Zone to the communities served. HEBCAC reported, “The main thing I see here on the barriers of HEBCAC, the operations, the programs, really was the expectations and the communications. I think if those two things were a lot better then most of the programs would have went better.”

Expanding Internal And External Networks: Village Centers reported they would make both:

1. More effective networking efforts to integrate existing community organizations should have been made, for example Washington Village reported they would have made “Better use of, outreach through neighborhood associations” and Harlem Park reported “More cooperation among different groups was needed. HPNC, HPRC HPLSVC, They all should have worked together.”
2. Earlier and more substantial efforts should have been made to engage outside change agents into Village Center operations. For example, Poppleton reported “I think we could have partnered better with a lot of organizations out of the Empowerment Zone, to bring in those resources.”

Better Board Management: Several Village Centers also cited improving Board design and functioning as something they would have done differently. One EBMC board/staff key informant reported - “Directors would come and go and the board chairs would change, I mean it was almost like the chairman of the month club in some of them.” Poppleton reported they would have a “Smaller Board, because then you would have a smaller quorum requirement and the board would probably be more functional.” Overall, many of the Village Centers reported they would make changes of some sort to their by-laws to create a stronger, more functional board.

Earlier Emphasis on Sustainability: All of the Village Centers reported that they wish they had made an earlier and stronger effort at sustainability planning. Washington Village and several other Village Centers reported an earlier emphasis on property acquisition would have been a means of ensuring stability. Several Village Centers reported that they should have engaged their boards earlier in the sustainability planning process. For example, East Harbor reported “I think we could have started the sustainability issue – and some of that could have been a board driven process, but bring up the sustainability issue a little sooner.”

Standing Up to EBMC: Several of the Village Centers reported that if this process were starting again, they would get a better understanding of EBMC’s goals and stand up to EBMC more often. One key informant reported – “If I had to do it over again, I would have never played nice with the original EBMC group. I would have structured it in such a way that if they did not fund what we wanted to fund we would have gone elsewhere.”

#### **4.3 Programmatic Changes**

The Village Centers also identified several methods in which the implementation of Empowerment Zone core program areas could have been improved. A frequent recommendation was that the Village Centers should have had a more central role in the economic development programs implemented by EBMC through the Business Empowerment Center. While the Village Centers were informed of and in most cases signed off on loans or other assistance provided to businesses in each Village Center service area, as demonstrated in the following quotes, many Village Centers still did not feel that they had a sufficient role in EBMC’s economic development activities:

“Well it gets back to communications again because there is a series of businesses that the Empowerment Zone can list, and you know, got a loan or some other kind of business assistance, but I don’t think – am not sure – HEBCAC was privy to that information.” HEBCAC

“They [the EBMC Business Empowerment Center] didn’t work with us. They worked around us.” Washington Village

“The decision making capacity, or capability, on economic issues – the big ones like Montgomery Park, those decisions were taken out of the hands of the Village Centers and were solely EBMC and EBMC board decisions.” Washington Village

These and other Village Centers felt that other programs, such as workforce development, would have been better able to work with the companies receiving EBMC assistance if they had been more directly involved in the economic development program. Stronger business participation with the Village Centers may have also enhanced sustainability.

The other major programmatic area where Village Centers made recommendations had to do with the need for better-integrated services to assist the workforce development program. One Harlem Park key informant reported – “[EBMC should] Take a more comprehensive look at employment – recognize the barriers first instead of just saying that okay, job placement was the first thing that was done. Focusing a little more on the barriers a little bit more at first.” Many of the persons served by the workforce development program must face multiple barriers to employment, such as substance abuse, transportation, education and a criminal record. While all of the Village Centers lauded the integrated services they could and did provide through the Empowerment Zone, they still thought more could be done to address the multiple employment barriers of the target population. Most importantly, they reported that more substance abuse funding and programs and basic, most importantly General Equivalency Degree, training would have made the programs more successful.

## 5.0 Summary and Conclusion

This analysis provides a useful case study of efforts to build community development capacity at the neighborhood level. While the federal Empowerment Zone program can be viewed as a one-time event, and the substantial efforts made by Baltimore to develop local capacity even further unique among federally designated Empowerment Zone/Enterprise Communities, the lessons of the Baltimore Empowerment Zone can be generalized to any effort to build local community development capacity as a means of implementing urban policy interventions. The experience of the Baltimore Empowerment Zone may be especially informative to the emerging literature on Comprehensive Community Initiatives (CCIs). CCIs are foundation-supported initiatives to promote neighborhood revitalization and redevelopment by directly involving residents and other stakeholders in the design and implementation of policy interventions.

The *Community Development Capacity Building Impacts of the Baltimore Empowerment Zone* report concluded that the community capacity building efforts of the Baltimore Empowerment Zone have been successful in terms of building community capacity - defined as functioning community organizations that have engaged the community to design and implement key strategic goals through a core set of programs. Five of the six Village Centers accomplished this basic level of capacity. However, the issue of sustainability of these five efforts after the sunset of the Baltimore Empowerment Zone, currently planned for December of 2004, is less clear. Sustainability requires both a high level of community engagement and access to sufficient resources to fund operations. Two Village Centers – East Harbor and Washington Village – appear to be well on their way towards sustainability. Two other Village Centers – HEBCAC and Poppleton – are in the process of inserting themselves into neighborhood redevelopment efforts as a means of representing the needs of their respective communities. The fifth Village Center – Harlem Park – is in the process of determining its long-term sustainability plans and merger with another organization is seen as a potential solution. Thus, the Baltimore Empowerment Zone achieved a significant level of success in building local community development capacity and can inform other federal, City, or foundation sponsored initiatives. The community capacity building experience of the Baltimore Empowerment Zone can be summarized into the following ten lessons:

**Lesson 1: Time Matters** – The original goal for the Baltimore Empowerment Zone was to achieve its desired outcomes in a five-year period. This proved to be impossible and the rush to spend down, created problems in that the Village Center could not spend sufficient time on the difficult task of planning for or creating new organizations. A longer start up process would have allowed more time for community mobilization and planning and more extensive early technical assistance. This would have likely created more viable and sustainable organizations. Village Centers also focused on becoming operational and delivering services and only later began to plan for long-term sustainability. Overall, an earlier emphasis on sustainability and creating linkages with the larger City power structure would have also potentially yielded stronger, more sustainable organizations.

**Lesson 2: History Matters** – Village Centers with a history of failed policy interventions – Self Motivated and Harlem Park – or a history of conflict with key institutions over redevelopment – HEBCAC – were less likely to form strong sustainable organizations. It proved to be difficult to overcome residents' cynicism about past failures or substantial power differentials relative to dominant institutions. However, Village Centers – such as East Harbor – that put a direct and

early focus on addressing a past history of conflicts (between the area's African American community and a leading organization) created stronger organizations. Thus, any effort to build community capacity must recognize the historical context of past efforts in a community.

**Lesson 3: Momentum Matters** - One of the most critical findings of this research is that community momentum matters. It is easier to engage the community and keep them engaged in a change process if an area is in the path of development activities, as was the case with both East Harbor and Washington Village. Community momentum provides a reason for residents to become involved, in order to either benefit from or protect their interests in the face of redevelopment activities. More importantly, community momentum provides incentives for the City's power structure – government, businesses, developers, and foundations -- to pay attention to community organizations because they can stop or delay development projects. Community momentum also provides incentives for other investments in the community – as development makes the return on housing, workforce development or economic development programs more attractive to external funders.

**Lesson 4: Community Mobilization Matters** – Village Centers with a stronger record of community involvement – East Harbor and Washington Village – created both stronger and more sustainable organizations. All of the Village Centers reported that they would have benefited from more extensive community outreach and engagement activities. More extensive community involvement was also considered as aiding in organizational sustainability, as external funders – most importantly foundations -- were more likely to support organizations with high levels of community engagement.

In mobilizing the community, *overcoming conflict* is the key. There are numerous sources of conflict in a community. Conflict can be race-based – as with East Harbor, Washington Village, and to some extent Poppleton, class-based, or history-based as with Self Motivated, or between newcomers and existing residents – as with Washington Village. The core to conflict resolution is effective community mobilization. Organizations that were able to get past the conflict and mobilize the community to address common issues became stronger organizations.

**Lesson 5: Leadership Matters** - The presence of strong, engaged local leadership is critical to the success of community building efforts. The experience of the Baltimore Empowerment Zone does not point to a single model of effective leadership. East Harbor is an example of a strong, staff-led organization while Washington Village is an example of a board-led organization. Community leadership can also be based on hiring and training local residents – where East Harbor was successful, or hiring a professional staff – such as Washington Village. Harlem Park focused on hiring local residents to run the Village Center, but according to some key informants this created a reluctance to remove local staff when they were not seen as effective by at least some members of the Board.

**Lesson 6: Linkages/Networks Matter** – The Village Centers that created the strongest internal (within the community) and external (with the larger City/State) linkages created the strongest organizations. Washington Village provides the best example in terms of the strength of both its internal and external networks. This Village Center has stronger board participation by the many organizations within the community than other Village Centers and created a stronger more representative organization. It also had strong Board participation by external organizations – such as local institutions and City government – which attracted both resources and programs into the community. All of the Village Centers seemed to focus on attracting key community

leaders to their Board and were required to have representation by all major organizations in their communities. In the opinion of this consultant, the capacity building efforts of the Empowerment Zone would have been strengthened if both the Village Centers and EBMC had done more to attract more participation by non-community stakeholders – such as foundations, non-profits or City agencies – on to the Village Center boards.

**Lesson 7: Politics Matter** – Politics can support or hinder the development of community development capacity. In its early days, HEBCAC’s strong ties to the City’s political leadership allowed the Village Center to attract significant City and external funding and programs. However, once the administration changed, HEBCAC was sidelined, its core staff leadership left, and the City created a competing organization to direct redevelopment in its area.

**Lesson 8: Communications Matter** – Effective communications is essential in any community capacity building efforts, especially in a large-scale, City-level approach like the Baltimore Empowerment Zone. Effective *internal* communications strategies between the coordinating agency – in this case EBMC – and the community organizations (Village Centers) will ensure that all are working towards common goals and that community organizations are aware of technical assistance opportunities or other issues. Effective *external* communications are critical for both the coordinating agency and the community organizations in order to control the expectations of the community, inform other key stakeholders on the status and results of efforts, and engage and mobilize the community in the activities of the community organization.

**Lesson 9: Planning Matters** – One of the most important successes of the Baltimore Empowerment Zone’s community capacity building effort is the creation of community-driven master plans for each of the Village Center areas. In many cases these were the communities’ first opportunities to create *their own* plans for *their own communities*. All of the Village Centers reported that the community planning process was an important means of engaging their community in the activities of the Village Center. For most Village Centers, the Land Use Plan required and funded by EBMC served as the long-term guide for their efforts, even after it was 5 to 7 years old. Several Village Centers supplemented their land use plan with their own strategic plans, and Washington Village revisited its strategic plan every year or so.

**Lesson 10: Goal-Setting, Monitoring, Evaluation and Technical Assistance is Critical** -- EBMC was engaged in a long-term process of working with the Village Centers to set annual goals, which were required as a part of receiving administrative funding, and monitoring and evaluating progress towards stated goals. EBMC used a ‘carrot and a stick’ approach to monitoring and evaluation. When Village Centers missed those goals they needed to present reasons to the EBMC Quality of Life/Capacity Building Subcommittee who could: a) sanction the Village Centers (some had their funding cut until a problem was remedied – others – Self Motivated were de-funded); b) provide additional time to meet goals or address issues; or c) could provide technical assistance to address any problems. Surprisingly, only one Village Center complained about the EBMC monitoring and evaluation process. The goal setting and monitoring efforts put in place by EBMC allowed it to recognize the problems with the Self Motivated Village Center early, and when efforts to address the problems failed, terminate funding. All Village Centers reported that they benefited from the technical assistance received, and the major complaint about technical assistance was either that Village Centers were not aware they could receive it (See Lesson 8) or needed more of it.

## **6.0 Methodology**

The Jacob France Institute conducted 5 focus groups and 19 interviews. France Institute personnel worked with EBMC staff to design a focus group guide and list of core topics to probe. The interviews were conducted with persons that could not attend a focus group or to supplement the information collected in the focus groups. Focus group participants and other key informants were identified and selected by the Village Centers and EBMC. The interviews were conducted based on the focus group guide. Focus group participants are listed in Table 2 and the persons interviewed are listed in Table 3. Focus Groups were held at the Village Center or EBMC offices and were professionally recorded and transcribed. In person interviews were held at the respondent's office or home and were digitally recorded and transcribed by Jacob France Institute personnel. Two interviews (Doris Hall, VCP and Michael Randolph, SMCPVC) were conducted by telephone and were not recorded. Focus group and interview transcripts were reviewed and analyzed by Jacob France Institute to identify core issues identified, similarities and differences.

**Table 2**  
**EBMC Focus Groups**  
**List of Attendees**

**Focus Group 1: HEBCAC (April 1, 2004)**

Mitchell Henderson	Michael Jenkins
Douglas McWilliams	Elroy Christopher
Ephraim Potts	

**Focus Group 2: Washington Village/Pigtown (April 5, 2004)**

Arnold Sherman	Shawn McIntosh
Edith Nelson	Mary Gunning
Raywin Corday	Shannon Jeffords
Mary Lou Kline	Bob Kirk

**Focus Group 3: Poppleton (April 12, 2004)**

Rev. Ned Brown	Lenny Clay
Jacqueline Lightfoot	George Thomas
Robert Blount	Clarence (Tony) Brown
Rev. James Ball	

**Focus Group 4: East Harbor (April 14, 2004)**

Talib Horne	Darryl Dunaway
Clara Butler	Caroline Boitnott
Dorothy Scott	Robert Haze??

**Focus Group 5: Harlem Park (May 10, 2004)**

Reginald Sample	Annie Thomas
Tachelle Rich	Cecilia Walker
Michael Carter	Lilly Swift
Howard Hill	Rev./Hon. Kwame Abayomi
Michelle Redfern	

**Focus Group 6: EBMC Staff/Sustainability Committee (June 30, 2004)**

Decatur Miller	Constance Maddox
Sister Barbara Anne English	Ian Newman
Bill Wiley	Richard Oppitz
Serena Neal	

**Table 3**  
**EBMC Lessons Learned**  
**Interviews Conducted**

**East Harbor Village Center**

Dwight Warren  
James Bond

**Harlem Park/Lafayette Square Village Center**

Carmena Watson

**Historic East Baltimore Community Action Coalition**

Michael Seipp  
Scott Spencer  
Del. Hattie Harrison

**Village Center of Poppleton**

Dr. Doris Hall

**Self Motivated Community People's Village Center**

Avon Bellamy  
Emanuel Price  
General Seitu Mohammed  
Inez Rob  
Michael Randolph  
Oscar Savage

**Washington Village Pigtown Neighborhood Planning Council**

Joseph Brown  
Shawn McIntosh  
Chris Ryer

**EBMC Staff, Board and Consultants**

Serena Neal  
William Wiley  
Diane Bell  
Naomi Booker