

**SPHERES AND FAMILIES:
Considering a New Construct for
Neighborhood Transformation/Family Development**

**A Report to the
Annie E. Casey Foundation**

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This paper was commissioned by the Annie E. Casey Foundation. It is intended as an exploration of whether, and to what extent, a new framework, conceived to depict the nation's youth development challenge¹, may also offer insights into and/or useful perspectives on child-supporting aspects of family development in the context of community efforts at neighborhood transformation. As such, what follows is less a rigorous scholarly treatise than it is an extrapolation.

I. Introduction: New Directions at the Casey Foundation

Since 1996 the Annie E. Casey Foundation (AECF) has been grappling with the challenge of executing on a new vision. As the nation's largest philanthropy dedicated to the well-being of the nation's children and youth, it strongly believes that said well-being is largely and most importantly dependent on the strength of families and on the various supports those families provide. But the Foundation also recognizes that the lives of children and the strength of families are not defined in a vacuum.

Just as children need strong families to thrive, families need thriving communities to fulfill their potential. Even the most resilient families find it difficult to succeed, much less pass on a legacy of hope to their children, in communities eroded by a lack of investment and opportunity. .The Foundation has surmised that nearly half of the children who fare the worst on most measures of social well-being live in roughly 500 distressed neighborhoods. High concentrations of poverty and unemployment, increasing social isolation, violence, and easy access to drugs are crippling these communities and compromising parents' best efforts to ensure bright futures for their children.²

Consequently, over the next decade the foundation will devote up to half of its grant making resources, or more than \$40 million, to demonstrating that "even the most distressed neighborhoods can offer families opportunities to learn, work, earn, and save in safe, vibrant, and congenial settings and to raise children who enjoy good health, emotional stability, and school success."³ Thus, a substantial portion of the foundation's resources will be directed to initiatives and investments thought to be catalytic to transformative change in a selected number of such communities.

The question then that this paper will attempt to tease out is what are some of the directions such investments might take and are there clues to be found in the "Spheres" framework?

II. Background: Spheres of Influence, A Youth Development Framework

In January of 1998, the foundation provided grant support for a concept paper to develop an overarching framework for community youth development. The paper, *Spheres of Influence*, "charted" a system of relationships between various components of youth

¹ Hyman, James B., *Spheres of Influence: Towards a Strategic Synthesis and Framework for Community Youth Development*, Annie E. Casey Foundation, forthcoming.

² Annie E. Casey Foundation, "Neighborhood Transformation/Family Development: An Overview, Unpublished. Pg. 1.

³ Ibid.

development, on the one hand, and corresponding community influences on the other. Dubbed spheres of development and spheres of influence respectively, the various components comprising the framework were alleged to be individually powerful, simultaneous and highly interactive in determining youth development outcomes.

Three spheres, skills, attitudes and experience, comprised the youth development side of the framework. Loosely speaking, these spheres were intended to represent things youth can do, what they feel and where they have been. The framework suggested that, as the elements in these spheres develop and interact, they contribute to a continuous evolution in what youth become on the way to adulthood. Contributing to all of this, according to the framework, are three spheres of influence on the community side -- programs and services, community supports and opportunities. These spheres represent avenues for the community's intervention and investment in the process of youth development. (The complex interactions of these spheres in producing youth development outcomes are beyond the scope of this paper and will not be elaborated here but Attachment 1 provides an illustration of these relationships and Attachment 2 illustrates the full model.)

To put the upcoming discussion in perspective, the reader should note that the framework, briefly outlined above, does not elevate families to a central place in its formulation. Instead, the paper acknowledges the pivotal potential of families to affect positive youth outcomes while at the same time recognizing the strong possibility that for many American children, particularly those who are poor, urban and minority, families may not. As a consequence, the Spheres framework includes families among many actors in a more generic set of "community supports" as a means of focusing attention on the kinds of supports youth need rather than on the actors who should provide them (and on the likelihood that they, in fact, will).

The NT/FD focus of the Casey Foundation, however, is directed squarely at this question -- that is, how can one invest in communities in ways that increase both the capacity of families to affect positive child outcomes and the likelihood that they will. This focus forces a more explicit treatment of families in relation to community development and the well being of children. Our question in this writing then, is whether a formulation similar to the Spheres framework for community youth development is both plausible and informative for the kind of "community family development" implicit in the NT/FD.

III. Issues for Clarification and Assumptions for this Discussion

Before proceeding, there are a number of questions around which additional focus and clarity might be helpful. Given the ongoing and dynamic nature of the planning and development effort in NT/FD, it is entirely likely that these questions are currently being explored and debated. Nevertheless, they are raised here as issues that potentially affect how we might apply a Spheres-like analysis. We will make assumptions about how each is to be treated in our analysis as follows:

- What do we mean by "family?" Is it more than the roster of individuals sharing a dwelling? For instance, is the fact of a child living with an adult sufficient to

constitute a family or do we need to specify a relationship (kinship or guardian status)? Do adoptive families have to be spoken to in this formulation? Is NT/FD concerned about the status of families without children (e.g. childless couples, retirees etc.)? Where do families without children fit in the NT/FD rationale? For the purposes of our discussion, we will make only a minimal assumption with regard to these issues -- namely that families will be construed as at least one child and one caretaker adult.

- Does AECF have a preference for the "types" of family e.g. intact, two-parent, two-biological parent, as opposed to single parent etc? This is an extremely slippery slope that is filled with politically charged rhetoric especially as regards "non-traditional" families. Still, it may well behoove the foundation to make some statement that clarifies the nature of NT/FD's target group. Is there a danger for instance, in stating an aspiration that all children be supported by two adult parents? It is likely that increased precision here will contribute to a better honing of intervention strategies. But even more importantly, as we will soon discuss, the rationale of NT/FD suggests very strongly that family formation may be an issue of concern to AECF. If that is true, it would seem that strategies to bolster family formation would require some specification of who (i.e. what kinds of families) makes up the target group. Though not explicitly stated, our discussion will implicitly attach some priority, in its interpretation of the NT/FD agenda, to increasing the likelihood young people, who conceive and give birth to children, unite to form strong two-parent households.
- What do we mean by "strengthening families" and how do we "operationalize" strong families in the context of a framework? For our purposes we will view family strength as an outcome of family development and structure the Spheres analysis to focus on how the foundation might intervene in that development process to produce strong families as an outcome. Doing so will require us to make two additional sets of assumptions -- one set to clarify what we mean by family development and another to specify the attributes or ingredients of family strength. For the former, we will assume three components: family formation, family function and family maintenance as the dimensions of family development of interest to NT/FD. For the latter, we will assume that family skills and strategies, family ties and family resources are the attributes that determine the strength of families. And in the course of our discussion, we will attempt to outline a set of definitions, goals and/or community investment strategies with respect to these more discrete concepts.
- How does NT/FD define the relationship between family development, as an instrument for improving child outcomes, and good parenting? The two are not the same. Effective parenting is a much narrower issue focusing primarily on the interpersonal relationship surrounding a unique child/adult bond that provides nurturance, guidance and protection etc. On the other hand, when we speak of strengthening families we could be referring to any number of things relative to the families' social, political and/or economic well being without necessarily implying anything about the existence or the status of any children. In our discussion, effective parenting will be assumed as a byproduct of strong families. But connecting these

dots through a theory of change statement will help clarify the NT/FD assumptions about this relationship.

- Finally, are there circumstances under which NT/FD's unit of analysis might change from families to individuals or groups of family members (e.g. fathers, single mothers, grandmothers, sibling relationships etc.)?

IV. Spheres and Families: Options for Conceiving a Framework

The questions above are highlighted here because each has implications for how a Spheres-like analysis might proceed. The assumptions we made with regard to them are ones we considered both reasonable and necessary to proceeding further. Still they need to be revisited by foundation staff and others to assure their conformity to AECF sensibilities. That said, there are several different approaches that might be pursued in applying Spheres to NT/FD. They list as follows:

- Family Development as the Dependent Variable. This approach to a framework suggests that family development is the dependent or target variable that NT/FD grants and initiatives will try to impact and that "positive" family development (e.g. strong families as stated) is the targeted outcome. It also suggests that we need to specify some theory or hypothesis about how family development links to community conditions (our independent variables) and to which specific community conditions. "Modeling" this information will allow the Foundation to devise intervention and investment strategies that promise to foster the community improvements thought to be most conducive to positive family development and consequently to positive family outcomes (another of which is presumably effective parenting). This approach comes very close to my understanding of NT/FD as an initiative to strengthen the ability of poor and distressed communities to support strong, healthy families. The links to positive child outcomes and positive youth development are presumed.
- Family Development as an Independent Variable. In this formulation, Youth Development would be the dependent variable and it would be configured as it is shown on the left-hand side in Attachments 1 and 2. Here family becomes a major external influence on that development. By contrast to the above, in this instance the analysis would focus directly on how families contribute or not to the acquisition of the skills, attitudes and experiences (as shown in the attachments) necessary to positive youth development. And at the same time, the analysis could be constructed allow us explore the interactions of family with other external influences such as programs and services and the opportunity structure. This approach differs significantly from my understanding of NT/FD in that there is very little focus here on community affects on family.
- Family Development as a Mediating Variable. In this iteration we find middle ground. Here we could again recognize youth development as the ultimate goal but insert families as a filter or mediator between the process of youth development and the various influences in the community that impact that development. In this case,

families would become both targets of the community influences and translators of community influences (both independent and dependent variables). In some sense this may be the real model implicit in the NT/FD materials to date. This formulation could be modeled to explicitly allow us to consider the impact of neighborhood conditions and influences on the family but also how those influences are transmitted *through* families to children and youth. At the same time it could be structured to allow for the possibility/likelihood that community influences are also transmitted to youth directly and in ways that families might not mitigate.

- The Family Development-Youth Development Nexus. In an entirely different vein, another approach to considering family development could focus entirely on the relationship between how youth develop and the choices they make about family formation. For instance, the goals for positive youth development are usually proscribed in only three areas -- preparing youth for positive futures as parents, workers and citizens. Preparing youth for positive parenting roles is essential to NT/FD. Pursuing this approach means looking back down the pipeline to the circumstances that will determine how the population of today's young people will approach (or not) their own family development and the extent to which they will attach high priorities to forming strong two-parent households. As such, NT/FD may find value in the original Spheres paradigm as a means for exploring how youth development efforts might be structured to increase the likelihood that young people in distressed communities will be more willing and better able to form and maintain strong and stable families.

Each of these options may hold value for NT/FD since each presents a different perspective on the relationships between and amongst community and community influences, and family development and child outcomes. However, in this writing we will explore only the first option since, in my judgement, it best conforms to the charge I was given to engage in a "thought experiment" around the Spheres paradigm and the NT/FD planning challenge. Here goes!

V. Community Influences on Family Development: a Spheres Analysis

AECF's new NT/FD agenda explicitly hypothesizes links between community conditions, family strength, and child outcomes in the following directional way (community ⇔ family ⇔ children). Its primary point of entry is stated as the community and hence it envisages investing in transformative community change efforts that offer promise of strengthening the first link in this sequence. Given this interpretation, our analysis focuses on the relationship between families, as the dependent or target variable, and community conditions as the independent (manipulating) variable.

Defining and Operationalizing Family Development

As stated earlier, two immediate questions come to mind as we consider how to think about family development as the target (dependent) variable. The first is how to operationalize family development. Are we concerned about family development in

general or are there specific components of family development about which we need be separately concerned? My sense of the issues is that family development, as a construct, may be too vague/general to be useful. Moreover my reading of the literature suggests that it may be possible to subdivide family development into at least three more discrete, and perhaps more useful, "operational" dimensions: family formation, family functioning and family maintenance. Since I am making this up, let me spend a moment clarifying what I mean by them.

The concern for *family formation* is really a focus on the circumstance under which people come together to form households in the first place. Given our concerns about the 71 percent of African American, and the 43 percent of Hispanic children who are born out of wedlock and about the correspondingly high rates of single parent households that result, it would seem that our concern for family development (and the attendant community influences) might well begin here. Issues of marriage and "marriageability," sex education, teen pregnancy and the like get to be important areas of focus in this realm.

Family function in my mind relates to the operations of households -- the routines and protocols etc. Many of the indicators outlined in Appendix 7-A of Robin Jarrett's June 1998 report to the Foundation⁴ are reflective of such family functioning issues⁵ -- for instance, family role flexibility, family cohesion, family routines, parenting styles, asymmetrical role structure between parent and youth, parental resource seeking behaviors, child responsibility training, parental monitoring strategies etc. Each of these, as well as others in the appendix that might be construed to reflect family function, can be thought of as components of family development that community investment might impact.

By *family maintenance* I am referring to aspects of family life (and perhaps family functioning) that form the glue to hold families together. With national divorce rates at 50 percent, this is clearly a major issue in family development. Recognizing, however, that divorce is not the primary cause of single parenting in poor minority communities, it is still important, I would argue, that a concern for family formation, on the front end of family development, be complimented with a effort at maintenance on the back end. Again Jarrett's Appendix 7-A provides hints as to some plausible ingredients of maintenance -- family activities and celebrations, family protection strategies, family orientation, religious orientation, ideology of distinctiveness etc. And here again, NT/FD might consider which of these and/or other "arguments" of family maintenance may be influenceable through transformative neighborhood change.

But beyond this issue lies the second question. That is, whether we assume that this or any other configuration of family development components is useful, what are the

⁴ Jarrett, Robin L. June 1998. *Indicators of Family Strengths and Resilience that Influence Positive Child-Youth Outcomes in Urban Neighborhoods: A Review of Qualitative and Ethnographic Studies.*

⁵ The characterization of indicators in this fashion is very subjective and therefore subject to any reader's interpretation. Their use in this fashion is intended to bring concreteness to the notion of family functioning as I have describe it.

"ingredients" of positive development in these component areas? That is to say, if strong families are the desired outcomes from family development, what would AECF have to provide to those families in order to achieve the desired outcome, family strength? (The follow up question presented later will be: how and through what *community* avenues can/should those supports be provided?) Let me propose three ingredients or attributes of family strength that might form the targets of AECF investment: family skills and strategies; family "gravitational" ties; and family resources. Language is difficult here as these terms are inadequate to fully describing what is intended. So, let me explain each in turn.

Family Skills and Strategies. Here I am attempting to capture aspects of family life that reflect a family's capacity to successfully negotiate and engage issues important to the welfare of its members such as: employability, healthcare, nutrition, education, safety, discipline and nurturance as examples. The principle notion here is the family's competency in promoting positive outcomes for its members and for the household.

Family "Gravitational" Ties. Webster's defines gravitation as: "the attraction or force of attraction that tends to draw material objects together." I have appropriated the term here to refer to the cohesion of the family. As such the intent is to suggest the bonds that grow from love; other emotions or obligations, faith, spirituality and/or humanitarian views; cultural norms; attitudes and/or other beliefs. The point here is to highlight aspects of families that help sustain them as households in spite of internal or external difficulties.

Family Resources. In this area we are referring to family income and, beyond that, family external social capital. That includes institutional ties, social networks and other resources both within and outside the community that are available to and accessed by the family and its members.

In general then, our task in constructing a Spheres model for NT/FD strategies is to: first, determine how to better define and operationalize family development as a process, and family strength as an outcome; and second, to hypothesize the extent to which, and how, each might be affected by the community influences, and additionally might be susceptible to manipulation by and through community level investment and initiative. Figure 1 helps us begin the first part of this process.

Essentially, what we have done in Figure 1 is to construct a three by three matrix that plots *components* of family development against *attributes* of family strength. And to further flesh out the exercise we have arrayed indicators (mostly from Jarrett's Appendix 7-A) within the various cells as might be appropriate. This is a very subjective exercise so opinions may differ about what belongs where. In this formulation, each column heading represents a dimension of family development (formation, function, and maintenance) and can be treated as a separate dependent (or target) variable for AECF intervention. That is to say that each column of the matrix could form its own basis for a foundation initiative. The row headings, on the other hand, reflect attributes of our outcome variable, family strength. The implication of the matrix, of course, is that these attributes contribute to family strength in each of its dimensions (formation, function, and

maintenance). Consequently, the elements of the cells highlight examples of specific issues and activities that an intervention might target to increase a strength attribute on the particular dimension of family development. For example using family formation as the outcome of interest, we would consider investments in sex education and family planning as among the several strategies offering promise of building skills that will yield improved/strengthened family formation outcomes. Using the information from Figure 1 allows us to begin constructing the Spheres model in figure 2.

**Figure 1:
Configuring Family Development as the dependent variable**

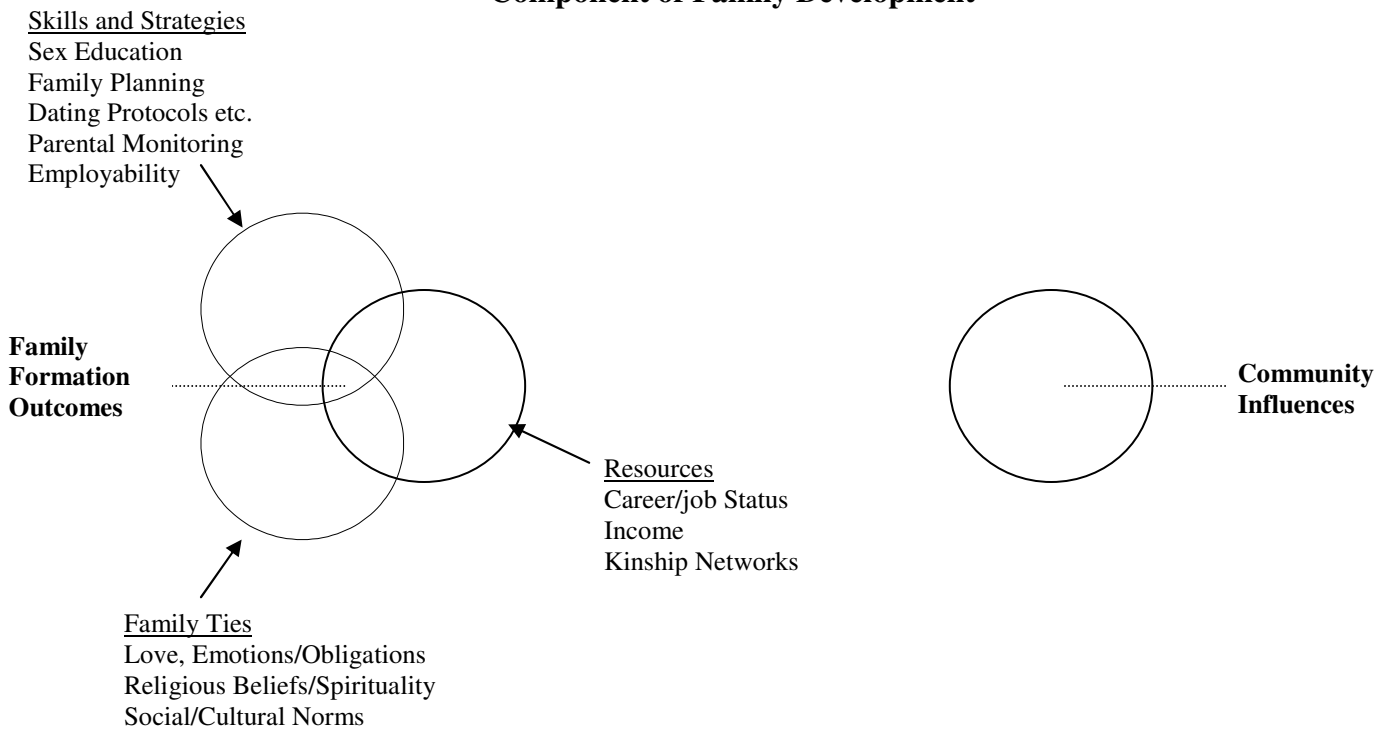
	Family Formation	Family Function	Family Maintenance
Family Skills and Strategies	Sex Education Family Planning Dating Protocols Parental Monitoring Future Life Expectations Parent Role Modeling Employability	Family Role Flexibility Stress on Educ/Mobility Family routines Parental Efficacy/Style Parent/Youth Roles Responsibility Training In-home Learning	Parenting Styles Parent Role Commitment Parental Efficacy Parent Monitoring Strat. Family Routines Racial Socialization Communication
Family Ties	Love Religious Beliefs, Faith, Spirituality Social/Cultural Norms Emotions/Obligations	Family Works Together Religion, Spirituality Distinctive Ideology Protective Strategies Family Orientation	Fam. Activity/Celebration Religion, Spirituality Distinctive Ideology Protective Strategies Family Orientation
Family Resources	Career/Job Status Income Kinship Networks	Kin Network Resources Resource Seeking Community-Bridging Income	Kin Network Resources Income

Because each dimension of family development constitutes its own area for intervention, each requires separate modeling. What follows is a Spheres analysis of Figure 1's first column (family formation) only. As such, in Figure 2 we have represented the attributes of family strength (skills, family ties and resources), in this case for family formation, as three interconnected spheres. Opposing them is a sphere that represents the community influences that we believe have consequences for family formation outcomes. Missing from this framework thus far however, is a statement of a family development (in this case family formation) goal. What is it that we are prescribing as the desired outcome of potential AECF investment? Let us suppose that our ultimate family formation goal is to increase the likelihood that young people will make responsible relationship decisions that will result in the formation of more, stable, two-parent families. Let us further

suppose that the interim outcomes important to that goal include: (1) deterring or deferring unplanned pregnancies among adolescents and young adults; and (2) increasing the likelihood that stable, two-parent families will (eventually) result where/if such pregnancies occur. The latter implies finding ways to increase both the *willingness* and the *ability* of young people to form and sustain a union. (It is conceivable that for NT/FD purposes we can be less concerned about "coupling" behavior that does not involve children.)

Using these goal statements we can now begin to consider intervention strategies in more detail. In particular, we would like to assure that our investments in skills, family ties and resources affect: (1) the likelihood that pregnancies will occur; (2) the competency of individuals to support a family when/if a pregnancy should occur; and (3) the willingness/disposition of young people towards forming a family unit in the first place.

Figure 2
Spheres Diagram of the Family Formation
Component of Family Development

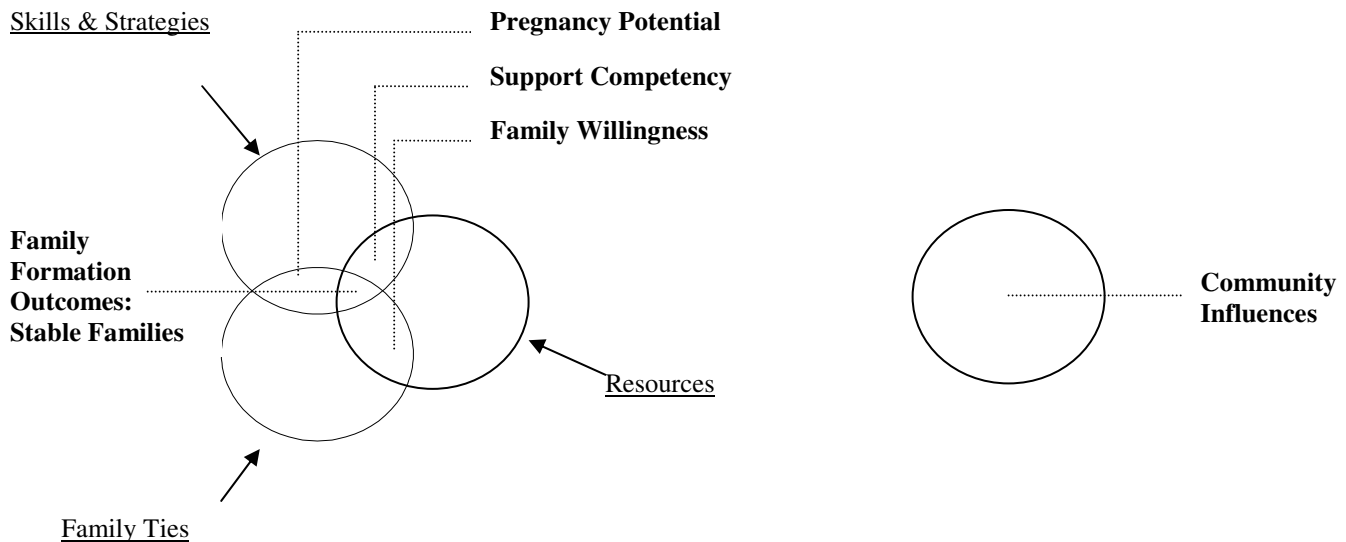


FAMILY DEVELOPMENT

Figure 3 is constructed to depict the relationships that exist in the Spheres analysis of these outcomes. What it shows is that investments in the areas of skills, family ties and resources interact in pair-wise fashion to affect the intermediate family formation outcomes we have specified -- namely, the potential for pregnancies, the ability to

support a family, and the willingness to form and/or support a family. In particular, the diagram suggests that elements of the skills sphere, including sex education, family planning, dating protocols and parental monitoring, for instance, interact, in the lives of young people, with elements of the family ties sphere such as love, religious beliefs and cultural norms to influence the likelihood of premature pregnancies. Intuitively it makes sense that kids who are more educated about sex and whose conduct is closely monitored by caring adults in supportive, loving environments are less likely than those who are less well-supported and informed to engage in unprotected premature sexual activity and/or to have early pregnancies. Likewise the framework asserts that these same skills interact with resources issues such as career and job prospects, income and support networks to affect the ability of young people to support families. And finally, these resource constraints combine with issues of love, religious, cultural and other norms and behavioral expectations to influence the willingness of young people, and perhaps especially young men, to enter into family arrangements with a pregnant or parenting partner.

Figure 3
Spheres Formulation of
Family Formation Intermediate and Final Outcomes



FAMILY DEVELOPMENT

The results achieved on these intermediate outcomes (pair-wise intersections) will in turn determine the ultimate impacts (three-way intersection) of AECF investments on family formation. In short positive family formation outcomes, such as the establishment of strong and stable households, require a combination of responsible sexual behavior (which defers pregnancies) and the willingness and ability to form and support a family.

It should be noted here again that separate Spheres analyses could/should be constructed for each of our other two component areas of family development -- family function and family maintenance respectively. For each we would follow a similar process of arraying the elements of each of the skills, ties and resource cells (from Figure 1) and transferring them to a spheres diagram. Finally, there is the difficult task of specifying foundation goals within each developmental area and the intermediate outcomes appropriate to those goals. We will not pursue this further here. Instead, we will begin to explore the other half of the NT/FD link -- community influences.

Configuring the Community Influences

The Foundation's goal in the Spheres analysis is to influence how the elements in the three spheres develop as the means of achieving positive interim outcomes and ultimately positive family development. Central to that quest is the NT/FD rationale that community change, in the form of neighborhood transformation, become the vehicle to influence that development. The notion is that strategic investments in the community will have positive impacts on the development and condition of families as depicted above and that, in turn, will lead to improved outcomes for those families and for their children.

Of primary concern then is the question, which investments? -- that is, how is family development effected by community conditions and which of those community conditions may be amenable to manipulation through investments and initiative strategies? Literature on the effects of neighborhood conditions on families is relatively new and still developing but a recent report from the Family Impact Seminar provides a particularly useful summary of what is known as follows.

- For adults, **neighborhood impoverishment** and **social disorganization** have been associated with increased male joblessness, lower earning potential for black males, and higher rates of adult crime.
- For infants and young children, **neighborhood impoverishment** and **social disorganization** have been associated with higher rates of infant mortality, low birth weight, and physical abuse -- as well as lower IQs, poor school achievement, and increased behavior problems.
- For adolescents, risk factors associated with **neighborhood disadvantage** and **disorganization** include lower school achievement, more school dropout, higher rates of teen birth, and higher rates of delinquency.
- Several features of **neighborhood socioeconomic composition** have been found to affect family life negatively: neighborhood instability, high residential mobility, the absence of job-holding neighbors, and family disruption (which increases the risk of child abuse, cognitive impairment, school failure, and delinquent behavior). In addition, lower **quality services and programs** available in distressed communities increases the rates of health and developmental problems among children, teen births, delinquency, poor school reading performance, and high school dropout.
- The links between persistent poverty and crime still remain unclear. Some studies find direct links between poverty and crime, but poverty rates alone are not sufficient to explain the incidence of crime. Many studies indicate that the link is more complex, specifically that persistent urban poverty is linked to crime through its association with family disruption and **community disorganization**.

- The impact of **poverty** on family life is consistent throughout the life cycle and has intergenerational effects. The lack of **access to health and educational programs** exacerbates these problems, leading to low productivity by adults and increasing the likelihood of poverty and dependency in the next generation.
- Lack of **access to jobs** diminishes legitimate earning opportunities for youth and families and contributes to the attractiveness of gang activity as an alternative source of income. In distressed communities, few **intergenerational job networks** exist to help young people into stable employment. Diminished job opportunities mean fewer employed adult males in poor communities, which has affected family formation and removed an important source of social stability and supervision. **Joblessness** also increases family disruption, which is a contributing factor in predicting rates of criminal behavior and violence.⁶

This excerpt highlights the many ways in which community conditions have been found to affect adults, youth, children and families. We have emphasized these important variables by placing them in bold type. Three major themes seem to emerge from the passage. First, poverty, joblessness and the lack of opportunity to improve one's economic future appears to have a profound and pervasive impact on adult, child and family outcomes. This suggests that a community-focused family development strategy must include, as a major component, efforts to enhance the community's opportunity structure in ways that promote and strengthen avenues for employment and increased economic security for resident individuals and families. AECF has a growing knowledge base to bring to bear here through its experience with The Jobs Initiative and its various explorations in income security issues and policies.

A second theme, which may be derivative of the first, is the importance of community social disorganization. Social organization in communities is often referred to as community social capital. Social capital, in turn,

..refers to the stocks of social trust, norms, and networks that people can draw upon in order to solve common problems. Social scientists emphasize two main dimensions of social capital: social glue and social bridges.

Social glue refers to the degree to which people take part in group life. It also concerns the amount of trust or the comfort level that people feel when participating in these groups....

Social bridges are the links between groups. These links are vital because they not only connect groups to one another but also give members in any one group access to the larger world outside their social circle through a chain of affiliations.⁷

Neighborhoods with high levels of social capital might be expected to respond effectively to forces of change and, in doing so, maintain or even enhance stability. Areas with

⁶ This review reports the results of studies conducted by the Social Science Research Council Working Group on Communities and Neighborhoods, Family Processes and Individual Development. See Cohen, Ellen, Theodora Ooms, and John Hutchins, 1996. *Comprehensive Community-building Initiatives: A Strategy to Strengthen Family Capital*. Family Impact Seminar, Washington, D.C. Pg. 6

⁷ Lang, Robert E. and Steven P Hornburg, 1998. *Editor's Introduction: What Is Social Capital and Why Is It Important to Public Policy?* Housing Policy Debate, Volume 9, Issue 1. Fannie Mae Foundation. Pg. 4.

relatively low levels of social capital might be expected to succumb to forces of change and experience decline.⁸ As such, attending to the social structure of communities and their capacity for social organization is another major potential focus for community investment aimed at strengthening families. AECF's experience through the Community Building Initiative should provide a strong basis for considering strategies in this realm.

A third and final theme taken from the excerpt is the importance of accessible, quality institutions, services and programs. Healthcare, daycare, childcare, education, employment and training, public health and safety and other social services are all important elements in maintaining the vitality of neighborhoods. Consequently, improving their effective delivery to and in distressed communities through the kinds of systems reforms and collaboration strategies and initiatives designed by the Foundation will also be important to the NT/FD agenda.

To capture these important community influence variables in our Spheres analysis, we will construct three spheres in Figure 4 to represent the community's: opportunity structure and opportunity supports; social structure and social supports; and institutional structure and supports. We elaborate below.

- Opportunity Structure refers to the variety of avenues available in and around the community for individual family members, particularly the adult caretakers, to improve the economic, social and political welfare of the family and its members. The regional economy, transportation, jobs, income, the availability of affordable credit and insurance are among the many issues that might be of concern here.
- Social Structure here refers to aspects of social capital and organization: a community's social/demographic makeup, how the community is physically and socially organized, and other characteristics such as culture, norms, and "condition" that affect how communities function as places that can support the healthy development of families and children.
- Institutional Structure here means the collection of organizations, programs and services charged with providing public and private goods and services to families and children. Education, employment and training, healthcare, childcare, daycare, child protection, and corrections are among the goods and services important here. Other important goods include recreation, fellowship and other forms of social exchange.

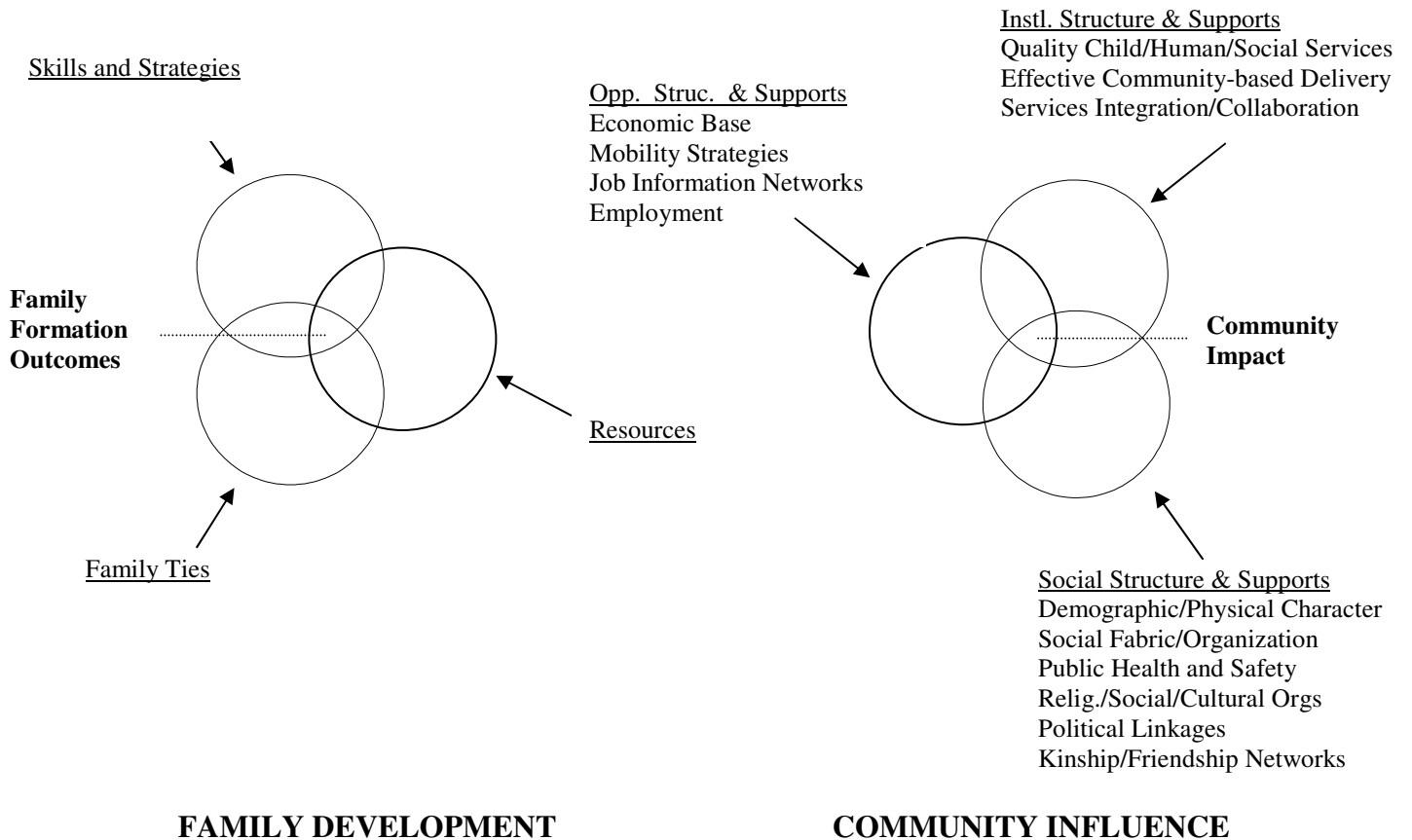
Figure 4 also includes a list of "ingredients" which should be included in the consideration of each of these constructed spheres. Some of these ingredients are outgrowths of the passage from which the spheres themes were derived while others have been borrowed from Table 1 of Robin Jarrett's report. Still others are possible and AECF

⁸ Temkin, Kenneth and William M. Rohe. 1998. *Social Capital and Neighborhood Stability: An Empirical Investigation*. Housing Policy Debate, Volume 9, Issue 1. Fannie Mae Foundation. Pg. 62.

would do well to reexamine this specification for its completeness and its alignment with any Foundation hypotheses about community influences.

In each of these areas (spheres) it is important to consider both the landscape (or structure) of resources available in and around communities as well as the underlying dynamics (or supports) that can make those resources more or less accessible. It is a question of existing resources, on one hand, and their potential utilization on the other. For instance, employment opportunities in poor communities will benefit more from their stronger regional economic base if they have, or establish, job information networks and transportation/mobility strategies to make those jobs accessible.

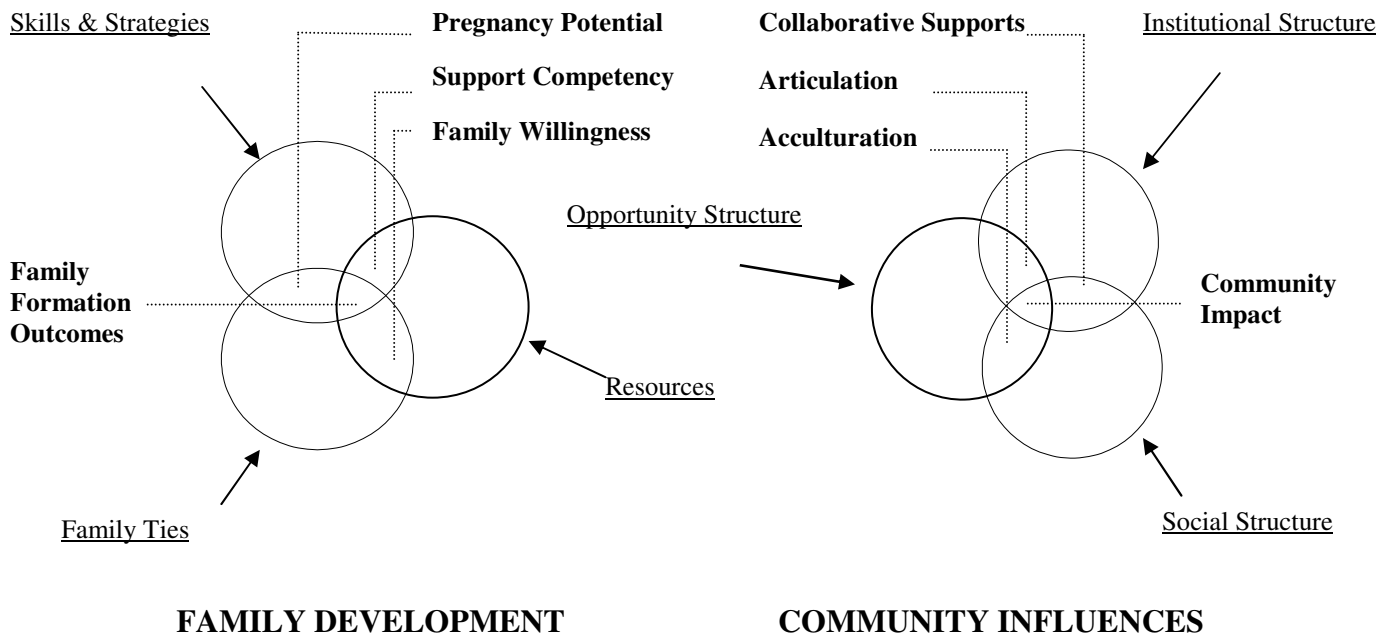
Figure 4
Spheres Diagram: Community Influences on the Family
Formation Component of Family Development



So Figure 4 maps the community influences that are potentially important to family development outcomes. And here too, as we asserted in our earlier discussion of family development, these community influences interact in significant and powerful ways. Specifically, the combination of a community's institutional structure, with its programs and services, and a community's social structure (its organization, networks, norms,

political links etc.) constitute the system of community supports that undergird its residents and families. In essence, these two spheres represent the resources available to families within their communities and neighborhoods. But the intersection of the two represents a uniquely defined area that suggests a close alignment of programs and services to the social organization and functioning of communities. This is the realm of collaborative supports in which culturally appropriate and context sensitive services may reside -- where, for instance, community leaders and residents may be joining with institutions to fashion a community consensus and vision to improve community conditions -- and the area where, perhaps as a consequence, residents may be more active in and supportive of child protective services, law enforcement and the schools. It is also a major realm in which the nation's comprehensive community initiatives are striving to be agents of change. AECF's experiences with: its five-site Rebuilding Communities Initiative, its community building efforts through the Atlanta Project, The Urban Strategies Council and National Community Building Network and its Local Systems Reform efforts in Hampton, VA., Indianapolis, IN et. al. are examples of efforts aimed at increasing the efficacy of this intersection.

Figure 5
Spheres Formulation of
Family Formation Intermediate and Final Outcomes



But the institutional structure of communities also interacts with the community's opportunity structure in ways that either support or inhibit the ability of neighborhood residents to apply themselves as may be required in order to succeed in various venues and endeavors. Indeed, the intersection of these two community influence spheres defines an area that we have labeled "articulation" to mean the closeness of fit between

the programs and services available within communities and those most productive of success given the opportunities available to residents. As an example, a major issue throughout the history of welfare-to-work programs has been the availability of local childcare. Without accessible local facilities to provide safe, quality care for their children, welfare mothers, who are by definition single parents, have difficulties pursuing and retaining employment. The availability of healthcare and insurance for entry-level workers, particularly unskilled adults and welfare recipients, has for many also been an impediment to taking and retaining a job. School-to-Work Transition programs are another example of efforts at articulation, in this case, in attempts to increase the quality and relevance of educational preparation in the context of local and regional labor markets. And the appropriateness of employment and training opportunities to local job opportunities has historically been a concern for publicly funded programs under the former CETA legislation and now under the Job Training Partnership Act. As a final example, several school districts have experimented with various approaches to increasing opportunities in education through "articulation" agreements (sometimes called Two-Plus-Two Programs) that coordinate the curricular offerings during the last two years of high school with two-year community college programs.

The point here is that the intersection of these two community influences defines a very important area of community supports for individuals and families. What is at stake is whether community institutions, programs and services provide appropriate and sufficient preparation and/or support to promote resident success in the context of opportunities available to them.

Finally, there are important interactions between the social structure and supports within communities and the opportunities available to them. Principal among these is the extent to which the community's norms, culture, social networks and organization, and political links etc. are compatible with the opportunities available to its residents and conducive to creating and sustaining additional opportunities for them. This is a particularly difficult area of the analysis on which to have impact first, because of the problem of separating fact from fiction. For instance, whether real or imagined, many employers perceive differences, and consequently discriminate, between job applicants based on where they live and the reputations of their communities. This is particularly true of suburban employers and urban black males. Clearly, where this occurs, employers are making presumptions about the community social structure and, on that basis, prejudging residents as unsuitable/undesirable workers. At the same time though, given the high dropout, incarceration and unemployment rates in many distressed communities, it is also likely that many residents may in fact not possess the kinds of social skills and work ethic necessary to success.

A second and, in my view, larger issue here is the challenge inherent in the task of investing in community social structures. While the literature has come a long way over the last decade in clarifying how the concept of social capital applies to communities, less is known about how to create it. And though many of the nation's community building efforts are directed towards strengthening social organization, they are not explicitly focused on changing the social and cultural norms, attitudes and behaviors that may

negatively impact the futures of individuals and families. Clearly this question is too large to be explored in this paper. It is raised only because, in this author's view, strengthening the social fabric of communities so they become more supportive of positive aspirations, behaviors and pursuits by neighborhood residents and families may be the transformation most essential to improving the health and welfare of distressed communities. We will not pursue this issue further here. Suffice it to say that we will use the term "acculturation" to connote the closeness of fit between community social structure and norms, and the array of available opportunities.

In summary, we are asserting here that community influences on family development occur through three major avenues (spheres) representing the institutional, social and opportunity structures of neighborhoods and communities. These spheres define the sectors in which investments must be made and the components included in them are vehicles for foundation initiatives. We are also asserting that these spheres are dynamic and that they interact in powerful ways to yield byproducts (intermediate influences) that include collaborative supports and various levels of articulation and acculturation. It is where these intermediate influences come together (center of diagram), that the community's impact on family development occurs.

Our challenge in this paper has been to determine whether the Spheres analysis can shed light on how neighborhood attributes and conditions interact with the development of families and, whether as a consequence, it can suggest some of the paths neighborhood transformation efforts might take to make communities more supportive of positive family development outcomes. Now that we have specified the variables that are believed important to this relationship we can proceed to discover what the analysis reveals.

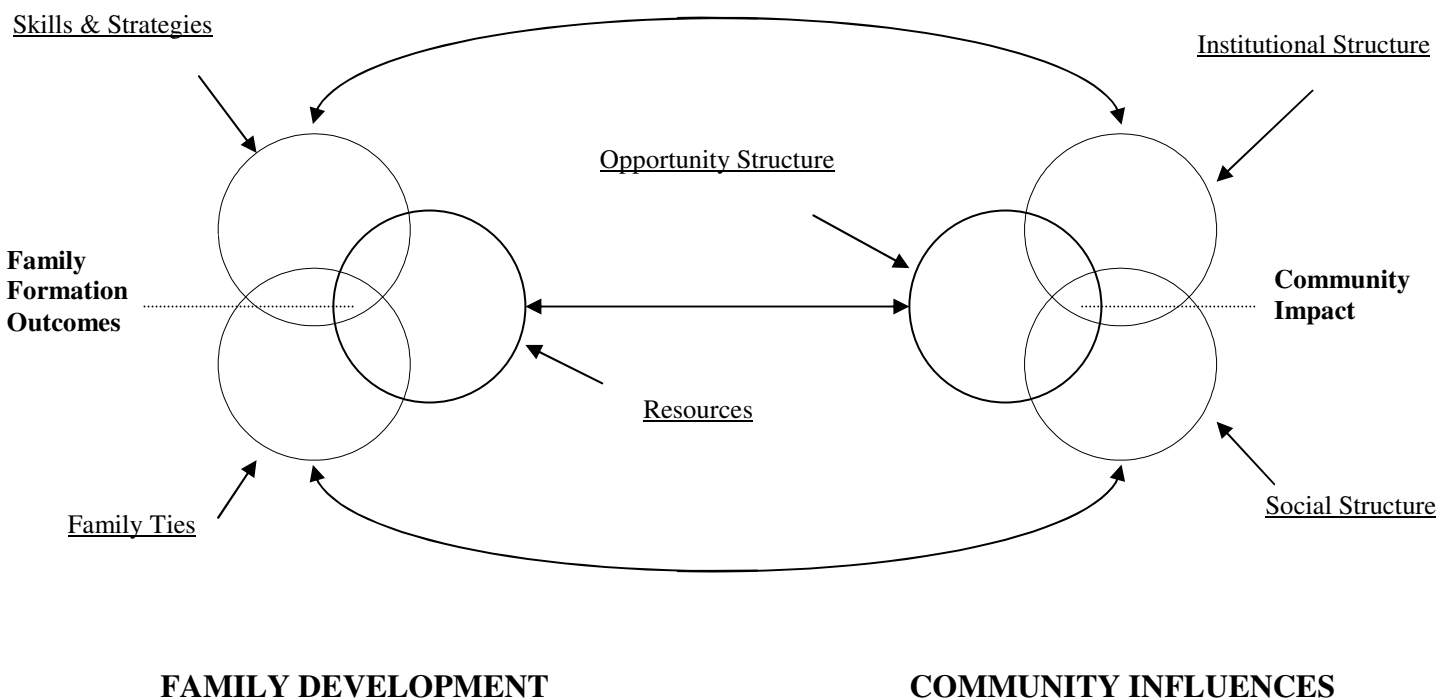
What Does the Spheres Analysis Tell Us?

The Spheres framework, as shown in Figure 6 below, provides a snap shot of the complex relationships involved in the processes that we have alleged to constitute family development. It consists of three spheres of family development (in this case for family formation only) opposed by three spheres of community influence that, taken together, represent a very dynamic and simultaneous system where everything is: affecting everything else, happening all at once and doing so all of the time. As random as this all may seem, there is order here because, despite the simultaneity of the framework, some of the relationships are more direct than others and are therefore avenues for investment.

In particular, Figure 6 shows that the community institutional structure, with its various programs and services, exerts a primary but not exclusive influence on the development of family skills and strategies. Schools, health and day care providers, and various family service agencies and programs are among the institutions exerting such influences. Similarly, the community social structure exerts a primary though not exclusive influence on the strength and durability of family gravitational ties. Social and cultural norms, religious beliefs, obligations and expectations, and behaviors are major contributors here. And finally, the community opportunity structure, as we have described it, works to

enhance or constrain family resources. These relationships are intended to represent a set of hypotheses, central to the NT/FD agenda, about how the process of family development is influenced by the community context. The elements within each sphere, on the other hand, are intended to reflect more discrete variables that can be selected as *targets* for family development initiatives (on the left-hand side of the framework) or as *avenues* for community investment and intervention (on the right-hand side).

Figure 6
Spheres Analysis of Direct Relationships between
Community Influences and Family Development Outcomes



But we have also shown, in Figure 5 above, that the individual spheres on each side of the framework interact with each other to produce intermediate outcomes and impacts that, in turn combine to define the family's development and to determine the community's influence. The objective of NT/FD strategies should be to ensure positive results among these intermediate phenomena as the Foundation's benchmarks for judging whether or not its NT/FD initiatives and investments are achieving any success in improving communities' abilities to support positive family development outcomes. As examples, if we again take the formation of more, stable two-parent families as a family development goal, our objectives would include: the reduction of early and/or unwanted pregnancies through the provision of collaborative services and supports; bolstering the ability of individuals to support families through a better articulation of institutional supports with the local opportunity structure; and enhancing the likelihood that young

people will form two-parent households through investments that enhance their socialization and acculturation. Our assumption in the framework is that positive results on these intermediate goals will lead to the desired outcome -- in this case more, stable, two-parent households. There are three central conclusions that arise from this analysis.

The first lesson of this framework is that in order to affect more positive family development outcomes, efforts must be made to strengthen the skills, ties and resources of families. The Spheres framework suggests that this can be done through investments that strengthen the opportunity, institutional and social structures of communities.

The second lesson from the framework, however, is that the positive family development outcomes we seek are mediated by the spheres intersections (intermediate outcomes). In our example, our objective in investing in family ties (love, spirituality, cultural and social norms etc.) and in skills and strategies (sex education, family planning, parental monitoring etc.) is to reduce the likelihood of early and out-of-wedlock pregnancies. Similarly we would invest in skills and strategies and in improving family resources with an eye to increasing the ability of young people to support a family should a pregnancy occur. And finally, the spheres analysis suggests that strengthening family ties and in increasing resources will increase the willingness of young people, perhaps particularly young males, to form families and improve the likelihood that they can and will sustain them. So, our investments in individual spheres are strategic to the fashioning of these intermediate outcomes which, if all goes well, should ultimately yield positive family (formation) outcomes.

The third lesson that derives from the foregoing is that we can not invest in family development directly. There is no way to "buy" improvements in family skills, ties and resources. Indeed, this analysis asserts, as does the NT/FD rationale, that better stronger families and, by implication, better child outcomes can result through investments that transform poor and distressed communities in ways that better support families. In particular it asserts that this can be done through initiatives that target and transform communities institutional, social and opportunity structures. In the end, as discussed above, it is the wisdom of those investments and the strength of those strategies that will determine whether the change in the level of collaborative supports, articulation and acculturation are sufficiently transformative to make these communities more supportive places for families and, as a consequence, places that can improve children's lives.

VI. CONCLUSION: How Might AECF Engage This Framework?

Spheres is intended as a model for how AECF might think about family development and consequently it is offered as a tool for conceptualizing how the foundation can view the challenge of its NT/FD agenda. Its utility lies in the degree to which it can bring additional clarity and definition to program directions and stand as the vision against which proposed activities and initiatives might be considered. We began this exercise as an exploration of what might be learned from adapting this framework to the foundation's

new NT/FD mandate. Our discussion and the conclusions above offer a good deal by way of issues for review by AEFCF staff. As their author, my first and perhaps primary recommendation for engaging this framework is that staff perform a thorough review of the assumptions we have used to make sure that they conform both to staff views and to what is known in the field as follows:

- Resolution of the issues outlined in Section III may offer important new dimensions to the analysis we have presented. In particular, in our analysis we have
 - Defined "family" as at least one child living with at least one caretaker adult.
 - Operationalized family development by constructing three component parts, family formation, family function and family maintenance.
 - Not distinguished between good parenting and family development as the primary thrust of NT/FD.
 - Assumed families as the unit of analysis and made no specific provision for considering individuals or individual family members as targets of NT/FD investment.
- Reviewing other options for conceiving the framework as outlined in Section IV may prove useful to confirming whether the approach chosen here accurately reflects the scope of the Foundation's vision.
- A close examination of how we have operationalized family development and configured community influences on either side of the framework is needed to determine whether this formulation is both a helpful construction for foundation planning and one that comports well with (or at least does no violence to) the growing literature.
- Finally, a critical review of the dynamics posited in the framework is important to assuring that the model offers a plausible rendition of the relationships thought to exist between conditions and attributes of communities and the condition and development of families.

Again assuming that the above has value, my second recommendation is that AEFCF staff attempt an analysis similar to the one conducted for family formation on each of the other constructed family development variables -- family function and family maintenance. For each we could borrow the cell elements shown in Figure 1 as the components of the left side of the framework and use the current configuration of the community influences to construct the right side. The difficult task that remains before the analysis can be completed is to specify the intermediate outcomes and influences that occur at the intersections of the individual spheres.

With these analyses complete, the foundation could begin to assess the array of targets it might chose for investment and intervention. For instance, it could decide what levels of emphasis to assign to a family formation versus family function or family maintenance as the principal targets of NT/FD strategies. And within each it could determine the types of

interventions that it believes hold most promise of affecting positive development outcomes (i.e. which cell elements of Figure 1 to target) in each of these areas. Complimenting this would be determining where on the community side to make the appropriate investments (i.e. which institutions, organizations and/or groups and individuals should be supported to launch what activities, programs, and/or policy initiatives to catalyze community change and strengthen families). The results of such programming decisions could then be summarized using a 3 by 3 matrix wherein the three operational components of family development (family formation, family function, and family maintenance) form the areas in which positive outcomes will be sought and the three areas of community influence form the avenues for investment through which those outcomes will be encouraged.⁹ Figure 7 shows the template. Filling out this matrix could provide a map of the entire NT/FD program strategy.

Figure 7
Framework for NT/FD
Program Considerations

	Institutional Structure	Social Structure	Opportunity Structure
Family Formation			
Family Function			
Family Maintenance			

⁹ This formulation and the matrix in Figure 7 may seem to ignore the attributes/ingredients of family development (i.e. family skills and strategies, family gravitational ties, and family resources) as developed earlier. In truth they do not because the attributes are embedded in the matrix. Recall that what we are investing in, according to the Spheres framework, are only the direct relationships shown in Figure 6. Accordingly, initiatives that focus on institutional structure are aimed primarily at bolstering and supporting family skills and strategies. Those that focus on community social structure are targeting improvements in family ties, and opportunity interventions are aimed at increasing family resources. As such each community influence shown in Figure 7 implicitly targets the appropriate attribute of the particular family development component.

Alternatively as part of a planning exercise, this matrix can also be used to assess and chart areas where the Foundation may have grants and initiatives, substantive strengths and/or workable hypotheses that speak to its individual cells or act as a template for identifying areas in which AECF may feel the need for more exploration, research and discovery.

Organizationally, the column headings of the matrix (the institutional, social and opportunity structures) conform to substantive areas where the Foundation has already accumulated some knowledge and experience. The row headings are a different matter. Because they are inventions for this discussion, they need to be further tested against the literature and the opinion of "family scholars" for their utility as organizing constructs. Whether these categories pass the "smell test" may be less important than the need for some specification that clarifies what we mean by family development and expresses that in operational terms. Whatever categories are used should then become the major elements of the Foundation's research agenda in order to acquire a better understanding and an increased confidence about how each element responds to and is affected by community and neighborhood conditions and influences.

Our final note in describing the Spheres analysis is a caution. The dynamics outlined here, while intended as comprehensive, operate in a larger context of social, economic and political realities. Public will, economic and budget considerations as well as the policy and electoral environments can each operate to impose constraints or enhance possibilities. It is important, therefore, that the Foundation maintain a constant vigil on the domestic policy front where all these forces collide in order to meld promising strategies with the larger realities that may ultimately affect the Foundation's impact.

The dynamics spoken to here are ongoing. They occur naturally and will continue to do so with or without the Foundation's interest and/or involvement. For the most part and in most places they affect positive outcomes for families and children. But for poor families and children in distressed communities, they too often do not and can not without thoughtful intervention. It is my hope that this exploration of the Spheres framework may lend useful insights to the Foundation as it pursues the challenge of fashioning an approach to Neighborhood Transformation/Family Development.