Tipping Point:
The Past, Present, and Future of Catalyst Miami

A Case Study Developed for the Kresge Foundation's Next Generation Human Services Initiative

LEADERSHIP FOR A **NETWORKED WORLD**

Contents

At A "Tipping Point": The Past, Present, and Future of Catalyst Miami

One day in October 2017, Gretchen Beesing, the Chief Executive Officer of Catalyst Miami, was reading the *Miami Herald* when she came across a startling photo. It showed tens of thousands of people waiting outside a local park in sweltering heat, hoping to access post-disaster food stamps.[1] The immediate cause for this need was Hurricane Irma, a severe storm that had avoided making a direct hit in Miami but had triggered extensive evacuations and caused widespread flooding, power outages, and transportation issues that had resulted in many people missing work for weeks.[2, 3] Nonetheless, for Beesing, the image was also a harbinger of another looming—and potentially more severe—storm. "When I saw the crowd," Beesing recalled, "I thought, 'This is about financial insecurity.' When you have 50,000 people that make too much money to get public benefits lining up when it's hot as hell outside, it's pretty significant."[4]

This image—and the issues it symbolized—resonated forcefully with Beesing for several reasons. First, combatting financial insecurity cut at the heart of Catalyst Miami's mission "to identify and collectively solve issues adversely affecting low-wealth communities throughout Miami-Dade County."[5] Second, the storm was a reminder of the threat

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1   Personal communication by e-mail with Gretchen Beesing, CEO, Catalyst Miami, June 17, 2019; Elizabeth Koh and Alex Harris, "It hasn't been easy to get food aid after Irma. You now have a second chance," *Miami Herald*, November 7, 2013, available at https://www.miamiherald.com/news/local/article183221681.html (accessed on June 18, 2019); and Glenn Garvin, "50,000 line up outside Tropical Park seeking post-hurricane food assistance," October 15, 2017, available at https://www.miamiherald.com/news/local/community/miami-dade/article178996361.html (accessed on June 18, 2019).

2   "Irma: A Hurricane for the History Books," *CNN*, available at https://www.cnn.com/specials/hurricane-irma (accessed on June 17, 2019); David Adams, "Hurricane Irma's track 'locked onto' Miami area according to forecast models," *Univision News*, September 7, 2017, available at https://www.univision.com/univision-news/united-states/hurricane-irmas-track-locked-onto-miami-area-according-to-forecast-models (accessed on June 17, 2019); and Alexander Gonzales and Tom Hudson, "A Year Later, Hurricane Irma Leaves Lasting Impact in South Florida," *LRN*, September 7, 2018, available at https://www.wlrn.org/post/year-later-hurricane-irma-leaves-lasting-impact-south-florida (accessed on June 17, 2019).

3   A category-5 hurricane in portions of the Caribbean, Hurricane Irma made landfall in southwest Florida as a category-3 storm. By the time the storm reached Miami, the winds had decreased substantially. "Hurricane Irma Synopsis – Detailed Meteorological Summary on Hurricane Irma," National Weather Service, available at https://www.weather.gov/tae/Irma_technical_summary (accessed on July 22, 2019).

4   Interview with Gretchen Beesing, CEO, Catalyst Miami, by telephone, June 16, 2019. Unless noted, subsequent quotations from and attributions to Beesing come from this telephone interview and other interviews, also conducted by telephone in 2018 and 2019.

5   "Our Work – What We Do," Catalyst Miami, available at https://catalystmiami.org/our-work/what-we-do/ (accessed on June 17, 2019).

that climate change posed to Miami-Dade County's low-wealth communities, a challenge Catalyst had begun tackling two years earlier.[6] Finally, many believed that the organization was, as Beesing said, approaching "a tipping point." This was in part because of recent growth that had increased the organization's size and stature. It also stemmed from the fact that Catalyst Miami was in the midst of a strategic planning process, begun earlier in 2017, that would have a major impact on the organization's approach. Thus, the image was not just a reminder of the depth of the problems that Catalyst Miami was confronting but also a call to action to seize the moment.

Recognizing this, Beesing forwarded the article to her staff and began jotting down a list of key questions to address with them and other stakeholders. Among them: How should the organization structure partnerships and reinforce networks with other stakeholders to advance its goals? What changes needed to be made to the organizational culture and evaluation efforts? What should Catalyst Miami do to promote racial equity? How should the organization reinforce its existing efforts to help the community build resilience given the threat of climate change, reflected in part by increasingly severe storms like Hurricane Irma? Most fundamentally, how could the organization help Miamians of low-wealth prepare for future storms, literally and figuratively?

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6   For a more detailed chronology of Catalyst Miami's work on climate resilience (and an overview of the organization's broader development), see "Catalyst Miami History," available at https://catalystmiami.org/our-story/history/ (accessed on July 24, 2019).

"A Perfect Storm of Issues"—Background on Miami-Dade County

Miami-Dade County is large, highly populous, and geographically and demographically diverse. The southern-most county in the continental United States, it stretches from Biscayne Bay in the east to Everglades National Park in the west and is bounded by Broward County and the Florida Keys to the north and south, respectively.[7] Its footprint—which occupies approximately 2,000 square miles—ranges from urban areas (such as downtown Miami) to rural agricultural regions to a Native American community.[8] In 2018, the county was home to approximately 2.76 million people, 52.9 percent of whom were born outside the United States.[9] This reflected the region's popularity as a destination for Latin American and Caribbean immigrants, which had contributed to the formation of a number of cultural enclaves, such as Little Havana and Little Haiti.[10]

While Miami-Dade County had many strengths (including tropical weather, beautiful beaches, and a sizable economy), it was grappling with numerous challenges, most notably a significant wealth gap. In 2018, 16.7 percent of the population lived in poverty, and according to a 2019 United Way study, "40 percent of Miami-Dade households [were] struggling to pay for basic necessities."[11] Meanwhile, the area was home to 30 billionaires, contributing to a finding by researchers from Florida International University and New York University that Miami had the second-largest

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7   Mark Osborne, Morgan Winsor, and Julia Jacobo, "First Hurricane Warnings Issued for South Florida as Irma Approaches," *ABC News*, September 8, 2017, available at https://abcnews.go.com/US/hurricane-irma-continues-advance-florida-category-storm/story?id=49673384 (accessed on June 26, 2019); and "About Miami-Dade County," Miami-Dade County, available at https://www8.miamidade.gov/global/disclaimer/about-miami-dade-county.page (accessed on June 26, 2019).

8   "Agriculture and Rural Area Study, Miami-Dade County," last edited July 12, 2013, available at https://www.miamidade.gov/planning/agriculture-rural-area-study.asp (accessed on June 26, 2019); and Brayan Vazquez, "Native American Tradition Still Thrives In Miami," *The Reporter*, November 24, 2015, available at https://www.mdcthereporter.com/native-american-tradition-still-thrives-in-miami/ (accessed on June 26, 2019).

9   "QuickFacts Miami-Dade County Florida," United States Census Bureau, available at https://www.census.gov/quickfacts/fact/table/miamidadecountyflorida/POP060210 (accessed on June 18, 2019).

10 Luis Fajardo, "How Miami became the capital of affluent Latin America," *BBC News*, May 16, 2016, available at https://www.bbc.com/news/world-us-canada-36281648 (accessed on June 26, 2019); and Franco Ordoñez, "As Caribbean Immigration Rises, Miami's black population becomes more foreign," *Miami Herald*, April 10, 2015, available at https://www.miamiherald.com/article18228377.html (accessed on June 26, 2019).

11 Johari County, "Report: Nearly 60 Percent of Miami-Dade Households Struggling To Get By," *WSVN*, February 8, 2019, available at https://wsvn.com/news/local/report-nearly-60-percent-of-miami-dade-households-struggling-to-get-by/ (accessed on June 26, 2019).

wealth gap in the United States and "a level of economic inequality similar to that of Panama or Colombia."[12] One of the underlying issues contributing to this inequality was that the local economy was largely driven by the service industry and tourism, which resulted in a lot of people working in low-wage jobs without traditional benefits (e.g., health insurance). Miami also had a high cost of living, including exorbitant housing prices; weak worker protections; and limited public transit infrastructure, which made it difficult for many people to access the more luxurious areas where tourism and service jobs were located. As Beesing lamented, for most working residents, "it was a perfect storm of issues."

"It was a perfect storm of issues."

– Gretchen Beesing, Chief Executive Officer, Catalyst Miami

Economic inequality contributed to another problem—sharp divisions along racial and ethnic lines. Hispanic residents were twice as likely to be in poverty as white Miamians, and African Americans were two-and-a-half times as likely to be in poverty compared to whites.[13] In part because of these economic divides, there was also evidence of racial and ethnic groups being segregated along geographic lines. Josh Diem, a professor at the University of Miami focused on race in public education, said, "The map shows how Miami is supposed to be this diverse place, but it's incredibly segregated by race, ethnicity, nationality and of course income."[14, 15]

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12   Andres Viglucci, "Miami-Dade's Tale of Two Cities: 30 billionaires and the economic inequality of Colombia," *Miami Herald*, April 22, 2019, available at https://www.miamiherald.com/article229441144.html (accessed on June 27, 2019); and Richard Florida and Steven Pedigo, "Toward A More Inclusive Region—Inequality and Poverty in Greater Florida," Florida International University, p. 3, available at http://carta.fiu.edu/mufi/wp-content/uploads/sites/32/2019/04/Final-Brief-Toward-a-More-Inclusive-Region.pdf (accessed on June 26, 2019).

13   Viglucci, "Miami-Dade's tale of two cities."

14   Nathaniel Sandler, "Map of South Florida Shows How Racially Segregated We Are," September 6, 2013, available at https://www.wlrn.org/post/map-south-florida-shows-how-racially-segregated-we-are (accessed on June 26, 2019).

15   A history of discriminatory zoning practices also contributed to racial segregation. For additional details, see "Race and Property," Miami Housing Policy Timeline, University of Miami, available at http://cdn.miami.edu/wda/cce/Documents/Miami-Housing-Solutions-Lab/raceAndProperty.html (accessed on June 27, 2019).

Finally, Miami was dealing with a major environmental challenge: as Camilo Mejia, the Networks Director for Catalyst Miami, pointed out, the county was "ground zero for sea-level rise and climate change."[16] The county was, on average, just six feet above sea level.[17] This meant that even a modest increase in sea levels could result in flooding that would make significant portions of the county uninhabitable and disrupt Miami's fresh-water drinking supply.[18] The specter of sea level rise and climate change interacted with another long-standing environmental threat—natural disasters, principally hurricanes. Because of its sub-tropical climate and location on the Atlantic Ocean near the Caribbean, Miami had long been highly vulnerable to hurricanes, and the expectation was that the severity of those storms would increase because of climate change.[19]

"I truly believe South Florida can be ground zero for a lot of what's happening across the nation, both good and bad."

– Santra Denis
Chief Program Officer, Catalyst Miami

While Miami faced steep obstacles, there was also a sense of optimism that the area could be a testing ground to develop human services strategies and solutions that could benefit the country as a whole. This was because the issues with which Miami was grappling (economic and racial inequality and climate change), while manifesting themselves especially virulently locally, were also affecting the entire country. "I truly believe South Florida can be ground zero for a lot of what's happening across the nation, both good and bad," argued Santra Denis, Catalyst Miami's Chief Program Officer. Capitalizing on these opportunities, however, would hinge at least in part on developing a more mature approach. "People say that Miami is a teenager with a mustache that thinks it's an adult," Denis added. "What comes with being young is being naïve and making the same mistakes...but the optimism is that teenagers grow up."[20]

"People say that Miami is a teenager with a mustache that thinks it's an adult."

– Santra Denis
Chief Program Officer, Catalyst Miami

The leadership team at Catalyst was prepared to play a significant role in helping the community navigate this process.

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16   Interview with Camilo Mejia, Networks Director, Catalyst Miami, December 12, 2018. Hereafter cited as Mejia interview. Unless noted, subsequent quotations from and attributions to Mejia come from this interview and a follow-up interview conducted by telephone.

17   Elizabeth Kolbert, "The Siege of Miami," *The New Yorker*, December 13, 2015, available at https://www.newyorker.com/magazine/2015/12/21/the-siege-of-miami (accessed on June 27, 2019).

18   Robert Meyer, "Miami and the Costs of Climate Change," Risk Management and Decision Processes Center," University of Pennsylvania, 2014, available at https://riskcenter.wharton.upenn.edu/miami-and-the-costs-of-climate-change/ (accessed on June 18, 2019); and Kevin Loria, "Miami is racing against time to keep up with sea-level rise," *Business Insider*, April 12, 2018, available at https://www.businessinsider.com/miami-floods-sea-level-rise-solutions-2018-4 (accessed on June 18, 2019).

19   "Miami's Vulnerability to Stronger Storms," City of Miami, available at https://www.miamigov.com/Government/ClimateReadyMiami/Storms (accessed on June 18, 2019).

20   Interview with Santra Denis, Chief Program Officer, Catalyst Miami, November 14, 2018. Hereafter cited as Denis interview. Unless noted, subsequent quotations from and attributions to Denis come from this interview.

Catalyst Miami Organizational Overview

Founded in 1995, Catalyst Miami had a multi-pronged strategy to build capacity and resilience and advance social and economic mobility in low-wealth communities in Miami-Dade County. At one level, the organization aims to build the capacity of individual families by providing and facilitating access to critical necessities. This is accomplished through The Prosperity Campaign, a multi-faceted service delivery effort that combines wealth and credit building (i.e., financial coaching and education, credit coaching, Free Application for Federal Student Aid (FAFSA) assistance, IRS tax assistance, and lending circles); benefits enrollment (i.e., Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program, Temporary Cash Assistance, and telecommunications); and health care access (i.e., Affordable Care Act navigation, low-cost/no-cost healthcare access, Medicaid assistance, KidCare assistance, and health coaching). At a second level, Catalyst runs a series of leadership empowerment programs and advocacy initiatives that prepare its clients to push for systemic reforms that can lead to broader change. Examples of leadership programs include CLEAR Miami (Community Leadership on the Environment Advocacy, and Resilience) and Public Allies Miami (an AmeriCorps apprenticeship that pairs young adults with local nonprofits). Core advocacy efforts include Tallahassee Days of Action (an annual constituent trip that allows clients to meet with members of the state legislature) and direct advocacy by Catalyst staff with local, state, and federal officials. Finally, Catalyst has established itself as a backbone organization across several networks, including The Social Justice Table, Miami Climate Alliance, and the Miami-Dade Oral Health Network. This has allowed the organization to strengthen its advocacy voice, disseminate innovations to other groups, and learn from and build capacity in partner organizations.

Underpinning this multi-faceted strategy was a large and diverse staff supported by a sizeable budget that drew on an array of funding streams. In 2019, Catalyst had 32 full-time staff positions, led by a "C-Suite" that included the Chief Executive Officer, Chief Financial Officer, Chief Operating Officer, and Chief Program Officer. The remainder of the staff spanned policy, data and evaluation, program, management, human resources, and community organizing expertise. Catalyst's 2019 operating budget projected $4.41 million in revenue, a 16 percent increase from 2018. These funds were expected to come from an array of sources, led by grants from philanthropic foundations (59 percent) and government contracts (23 percent). Other revenue sources included corporate support, individual donations, fundraising events, and program income.

Sources: This sidebar draws on data from the Catalyst Miami website (www.catalystmiami.org) as well as telephone interviews and personal communications by e-mail with Catalyst Miami CEO Gretchen Beesing.

1995 – 2002: Launching Catalyst Miami

Catalyst's journey to support the community had begun decades earlier in the mid 1990s when Daniella Levine Cava, an attorney and social worker then serving as a board member and the chair of the Social Policy Committee for the League of Women Voters of Miami-Dade County, feared yet another looming storm—anticipated changes to welfare policy.[21] In response, Cava, who had an extensive background in human services leadership in South Florida, worked with the League of Women Voters to organize a luncheon on "The Changing Face of Human Services."[22] The event—which attracted approximately 150 attendees and featured a panel with the county commissioner and leading state and county human services officials—left some attendees sensing that they were just scratching the surface of what needed to be done. As Cava recalled, one person stood up and said, "'We need a group that's going to monitor these changes. This can't be a one-off thing.'" Cava responded, "Okay, let's see who's interested." Two weeks later, approximately 50 people met to discuss next steps, leading to the formation of the Human Services Coalition (HSC) "to address the impact of welfare reform on low-income families."[23]

The group quickly made a significant impact. In 1997, HSC received national recognition for its "Families in Touch Program," an initiative that helped people in low-income housing find work. That same year, the organization introduced "Dade Days," a program that gave constituents an opportunity to advocate for policy changes before members of the

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21   During the 1992 presidential campaign, Bill Clinton had pledged to "end welfare as we have come to know it." This led to the passage in 1996 of The Personal Responsibility and Work Opportunity Reconciliation Act, which (among other changes) increased work requirements for adult beneficiaries and restricted the duration and amount of aid someone could receive. Many feared that these changes would leave high-need populations without vital benefits. Mary Pilon, "How Bill Clinton's Welfare Reform Changed America," *History Stories*, August 29, 2018, available at https://www.history.com/news/clinton-1990s-welfare-reform-facts (accessed on June 27, 2019); Christopher Jencks, "1990: Welfare Then and Now," *The American Prospect*, May 22, 2005, available at https://prospect.org/article/1990-welfare-then-and-now (accessed on June 27, 2019); Isabel Sawhill, R. Kent Weaver, and Ron Haskins, "Welfare Reform Reauthorization: An Overview of Problems and Issues," *Brookings*, January 3, 2001, available at https://www.brookings.edu/research/welfare-reform-reauthorization-an-overview-of-problems-and-issues/ (accessed on June 27, 2019); and Max Ehrenfreund, "How welfare reform changed American poverty, in 9 charts," *The Washington Post*, August 22, 2016, available at https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/wonk/wp/2016/08/22/the-enduring-legacy-of-welfare-reform-20-years-later/?utm_term=.12df89ff0731 (accessed on June 27, 2019).

22   Cava had worked in numerous human services organizations, including Legal Services of Greater Miami, the Guardian Ad Litem Program, and the Department for Children and Families. "About Commissioner Daniella Levine Cava," Miami-Dade County, 2019, available at http://www8.miamidade.gov/global/government/commission/district08/about-commissioner-cava.page (accessed on June 27, 2019).

23   Interview with Daniella Levine Cava, Commissioner, Miami-Dade County, December 13, 2018. Hereafter cited as Cava interview. Unless noted, subsequent quotations from and attributions to Cava come from this interview and follow-up interviews conducted by telephone.

state legislature in Tallahassee.[24] And, in 1998, HSC established its first constituent leadership development training, the "New Leaders Program," which focused on empowering immigrants. Still, the most significant early accomplishment involved organizing the Community Coalition for a Living Wage (CCLW) in 1997 and successfully lobbying for a living wage ordinance in Miami-Dade County in 1999. The ordinance, the first of its kind in the Southeastern United States, was significant in part because it would help a wide range of people.[25] The collaborative manner in which the advocacy effort occurred was also important. Led by HSC, the CCLW included representatives from labor, academics, and a local faith-based coalition; this indicated that HSC could not only effect policy change but also do so as the leader of a collaborative ecosystem. Cava reflected, "It was a very, very strong coalition effort, and HSC became the hub of the coalition."

Despite these successes, HSC faced early challenges. One was establishing the infrastructure to support its growing work. At first, the organization received a small grant from a local foundation and operated out of Cava's home where she held board meetings over dinners in her living room. Over time, HSC received support from an array of foundations, government agencies, and private donors.[26] In 1996, this allowed Cava to hire her first staff member, Rasha Soray Cameau, who had been working with Miami's mayor's office on local Haitian outreach. She tasked her with creating systems for accounting, grant management, donor communications, and human resources. Cava imbued in this internal work the same visionary thinking that shaped HSC's external efforts. Cameau recalled, "Daniella…said, 'Fix it. Figure out how we can formalize the organization.' Daniella's a big thinker. She sees a challenge or an obstacle. She doesn't see the status quo; she sees it as something we should work on fixing."[27]

> *"Daniella's a big thinker. She sees a challenge or an obstacle. She doesn't see the status quo; she sees it as something we should work on fixing."*
>
> – Rasha Soray Cameau
> Director, North Miami Community Redevelopment Agency and former Deputy Director for Administration, Catalyst Miami

Another challenge involved navigating relationships with the business community. At first, Cava felt conflicted about whether to pursue these connections. On the one hand, many local businesses—especially representatives of the hospitality and banking industries—could play an integral role in supporting HSC's work. On the other hand, at least to an extent, partnering with the business community seemed outside the realm of the social justice work. Cava said, "I came to understand that business partnerships could open new doors." Cava joined the Chamber of Commerce and built relationships with local business leaders. This paid dividends in 2002 when HSC launched The Prosperity Campaign, a ground-breaking service delivery model that helped people access an array of social services and support—including food stamps, the earned income tax credit, and children's health care—in one place. The local business community helped recruit participants—and provided some services on site—because Cava persuasively argued that they would benefit from a healthy and financially secure workforce.[28] She concluded, "If things are really going to change to benefit the people, it has to be good for business too… That was my major innovation."[29]

> *"If things are really going to change to benefit the people, it has to be good for business too."*
>
> – Daniella Levine Cava
> Commissioner, Miami-Dade County,
> Founder, Catalyst Miami

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24 The practice of bringing residents to meet with members of the state legislature still exists and is now known as "Tallahassee Days of Action." For additional details, see "Catalyst Community Delegation to Tallahassee," Catalyst Miami, available at https://catalystmiami.org/tally/ (accessed on July 24, 2019).

25 "Catalyst Miami History," available at https://catalystmiami.org/our-story/history/ (accessed on June 19, 2019).

26 Initially, HSC received fiscal sponsorship through Barry University's School of Social Work; in 1996, the organization received its 501(c)(3) designation. Catalyst received its first government grant (from the Department of Health) in 1998. "Catalyst Miami History."

27 Interview with Rasha Soray Cameau, Director, North Miami Community Redevelopment Agency, by telephone, June 10, 2019. Subsequent quotations from and attributions to Cameau come from this interview.

28 HSC also administered The Prosperity Campaign at its office, public libraries, and hotels.

29 Cava also strategically developed relationships with other non-profits, especially the United Way, which had strong connections to local businesses and, as Cava recalled, supported The Prosperity Campaign.

HSC's Approach To Advancing Social and Economic Mobility

The Prosperity Campaign helped to crystallize HSC's strategy, which built resilience in low-wealth communities by blending direct service provision, advocacy, and empowerment under the umbrella of an upstream approach. One layer of this strategy revolved around The Prosperity Campaign, which provided direct client services and service referrals that promoted social and economic advancement for individual families. As Beesing explained, "It [The Prosperity Campaign] is all about family self-sufficiency and capacity building. It's helping families chart a path of success for themselves so that there's more economic mobility built into their future." A second layer involved HSC's leadership empowerment programs (e.g., the New Leaders Program) and policy advocacy initiatives (e.g., Dade Days). HSC believed that, if clients were financially stable thanks to the services provided by The Prosperity Campaign, they would then be in position to leverage the leadership programs and advocacy initiatives to push for systemic changes that could advance social and economic mobility on a larger scale. Cava reflected, "It was a combination of service and advocacy. And advocacy from a policy standpoint…but also empowerment of those directly affected to be the truth tellers." What's more, all of these efforts were designed to solve problems at the point of origin. Cameau recalled a story that Cava shared to that effect: "She said, 'Usually when you look at nonprofits, it's like you're in front of a river that babies are flowing down, and a nonprofit will be there to rescue the babies and help them. Our job is to go up the river to see who's throwing the baby in the river and to stop it.'"[30]

Capacity Building Through Networks and Leadership Development: 2003 – 2012

In the 2000s, HSC received support from new funders that facilitated the expansion of existing programs and the creation of new initiatives. The organization had previously received support from The Knight Foundation, The Ford Foundation, The Kresge Foundation, and the U.S. Department of Health, and HSC subsequently received additional backing from The Ford Foundation, Allegany Franciscan Ministries, and The Kresge Foundation.[31] With more support, HSC was able to expand The Prosperity Campaign across the state and add new services to the campaign, including a financial

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30   The notion of going upstream to solve problems—and the specific anecdote of the babies floating down a river—is popular in healthcare reform. For additional details, see "What is 'upstream healthcare'?", a TED Talk by Rishi Manchanda, the founder of HealthBegins.org, available at https://www.healthbegins.org (accessed on June 20, 2019).

31   "Catalyst Miami History."

literacy curriculum.[32, 33] HSC also introduced more nationally recognized constituent empowerment programs, such as the Parent Leadership Training Institute and Public Allies Miami.[34] Finally, HSC took on new advocacy efforts, including launching a "Penny Wise, Pound Foolish Campaign" to oppose county budget cuts for social services.[35] Thus, even as HSC grew substantially, it remained committed to a strategy that blended direct services, leadership training, and advocacy.

Nevertheless, as the organization expanded, it encountered new challenges. One involved branding. Originally envisioned as a coalition to respond to the impact of welfare reform, HSC had begun tapping into a much broader array of issues, including immigration and civic leadership. What's more, while it had many valuable partners, the organization was not functioning purely as a coalition, as it originally had. Consequently, in 2010, Cava, changed the name of the organization from the Human Services Coalition to Catalyst Miami, a shift that was designed to reflect Cava's vision of the organization not as a direct service provider but instead

"Catalyst Miami always rides the crest of the wave and then moves on, and Catalyst Miami is left building the next wave."

- Daniella Levine Cava
Commissioner, Miami-Dade County
Founder, Catalyst Miami

as a "change agent" that incubated and disseminated new ideas. Recalling an insight from a founding board member, Cava said, "Catalyst Miami always rides the crest of the wave and then moves on, and Catalyst Miami is left building the next wave."

To position the organization to sustain this innovative work, Cava bolstered Catalyst's board of directors and staffing. Originally, Cava recalled, board members were passionate about building a coalition in response to welfare reform but "not at all focused on organizational longevity." As Catalyst matured, she added term limits and recruited board members who could help with fundraising. To deepen the staff, Cava hired Beesing, who had a background in social work and joined Catalyst in 2007, as well as Brian Larson, an experienced non-profit financial management professional who became Catalyst's Chief Financial Officer in 2012.[36, 37] They helped Cava manage over 25 full-time staff members, a multi-million-dollar-budget, and a dedicated office space. Catalyst had come a long way from being a nascent coalition meeting over dinner in Cava's living room; it was a fully functioning professional organization.

As the staff grew and the organization matured, Cava adapted her leadership style, which instinctively emphasized pushing for rapid change but sometimes overwhelmed her staff. Cava said, "I was addicted to action." She added, "There was an always an Achilles heel of, 'do more, do more,' and that drives people away." She worked with a spiritual guru at her synagogue as well as a leadership coach (who also worked with her leadership team) to temper this tendency. This helped to create a culture within the organization that emphasized "co-creating" and drawing on "what everybody brings to the table." Cava elaborated: "The assets are the people, so I started getting really involved in human resource management, how to motivate people to share the vision [and] how to grow together. I wanted people to bring their very best to the table. I wanted it not to be a job, I wanted it be consistent with their life's calling." Underlying all of this

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32   "Catalyst Miami," PowerPoint Presentation obtained from Catalyst Miami.

33   Allegany Franciscan Ministries and The Kresge Foundation did not support The Prosperity Campaign but did support other efforts.

34   The Parent Leadership Training Institute, which is based on a program that originated in Connecticut, "trains parents and children to become effective advocates in their communities." Public Allies Miami is a "ten-month, paid AmeriCorps apprenticeship [that] develops the leadership skills of young adults [who are] passionate about social justice and community involvement. Allies are matched with local nonprofits where they gain career-building experience while increasing our partner organizations' capacities to fulfill their missions." "HSC Brings Parent Leadership Training Institute and Public Allies To Miami," Catalyst Miami, available at https://catalystmiami.org/timeline/hsc-brings-parent-leadership-training-institute-and-public-allies-to-miami/ (accessed on July 24, 2019); "An Intersectional Perspective on Well-Being," Catalyst Miami Donor Literature, obtained via a personal communication by e-mail with Gretchen Beesing on July 19, 2019; and "Public Allies Miami," available at https://publicallies.org/miami/ (accessed on July 24, 2019).

35   For more details on HSC's accomplishments during this era, see "Catalyst Miami History."

36   Interview with Brian Larson, Chief Financial Officer, Catalyst Miami, by telephone, June 29, 2019.

37   The hiring of Larson represented an ongoing effort to strengthen the organization's business practices. To that same end, Cava participated in a leadership fellowship program organized by the Miami Chapter of the International Women's Forum. The lone non-profit leader in the fellowship, Cava gleaned valuable advice about sound business practices from her corporate counterparts. The experience, she added, provided another way to make inroads in the business community.

was a fundamental but difficult-to-master communication skill. "Learning to listen," Cava reflected, "is a lifelong pursuit."

"Learning to listen is a lifelong pursuit."

– Daniella Levine Cava
Commissioner, Miami-Dade County
Founder, Catalyst Miami

Another key to Catalyst's growth during this time period was participating in a learning cohort of human services non-profits at the University of Miami. As part of the initiative, Cava enrolled in graduate-level classes at the University of Miami's School of Education and Human Development. Catalyst also worked closely with a faculty member, Professor Scot Evans, a community psychologist who partnered with the organization on a series of evaluation and change initiatives.[38] This included helping to create a "learning culture," largely through the establishment of a transformation or "T" team that brought together people from different parts and levels of the organization and strategized around enterprise-wide issues. Evans also helped Catalyst to build and lead a network of anti-poverty organizations, an objective that dovetailed with the growing clarity surrounding Catalyst's comparative advantage as the hub of an ecosystem. Evans reflected, "They were realizing that one of the roles they might better play is to be a convener and help to establish a mechanism for several organizations or many organizations to come together to build a collective power base to be able to do this work, versus singular organizations doing their work."[39]

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38   Evans shared with Catalyst the S-P-E-C model, an acronym for strengths, preventions, empowerment, and community. Evans explained, "We could gently critique traditional human services and say that too often they are not focused on strengths; they are focused on deficiencies. They are not focused on prevention. They are focused on detaching clients, instead of engaging citizens. C was for community; they are more focused on individual change versus community change."

39   Interview with Professor Scot Evans, University of Miami School of Education and Human Development, December 13, 2018. Hereafter cited as Evans interview. Unless noted, subsequent quotations from and attributions to Evans come from this interview and a follow-up interview conducted by telephone.

Catalyst put its vision of serving as a convener into action in 2011 when it launched The Miami Thrives Network, an anti-poverty coalition of service providers, faith-based groups, and labor organizations—an experience that illuminated the challenges of leading a network. One was that, absent a crisis, the incentive to collaborate diminished. Amidst welfare reform and other cutbacks to social services, groups came together; by contrast, as Cava explained, "If there wasn't something like that...then people would go back to doing their own thing." Another obstacle was ensuring that staff had a foundational understanding of how networks function. Cava had Evans teach Catalyst staff about network theory and analysis, including highlighting the importance of a skilled backbone organization. Finally, the experience illustrated that Catalyst needed someone with experience building networks, a skillset that was lacking on the current staff.[40]

This emphasis on and learnings surrounding knowledge and capacity building led to progress in Catalyst's network-building efforts. In 2013, the organization launched The Social Justice Table, whose mission was "to create a synergistic and collaborative community of social justice organizations."[41] Then, in 2014, Catalyst hired Mejia, a former community organizer, as its Networks Director to lead The Social Justice Table. Mejia drew on his expertise to help The Social Justice Table take off. As Evans said, "He [Mejia] had a different set of skills to bring to that work and understood relational organizing, and how you build the shared theory of change, and a common purpose." The success of The Social Justice Table was evident in the support from the funder, Allegany Franciscan Ministries. Daniel Gibson, Allegany's Regional

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40   For an analysis of The Miami Thrives Network, see Scot Evans et. al, "Miami Thrives: Weaving a Poverty Reduction Coalition," *American Journal of Community Psychology* 53 (3), pp. 357-368, available at https://www.researchgate.net/publication/261762516_Miami_Thrives_Weaving_a_Poverty_Reduction_Coalition (accessed on June 29, 2019).

41   "A Year of Transitions," Catalyst Miami, available at https://staging.catalystmiami.org/timeline/a-year-of-transitions/ (accessed on July 23, 2019).

Vice President for Miami-Dade County, said, "We usually fund things two or three years, and then we pull out, and aim for sustainability, but we've been with them for the long haul through...the Social Justice Table."

"We've been with them for the long haul."

– Daniel Gibson
Regional Vice President for Miami-Dade County
Allegany Franciscan Ministry

More broadly, the success of The Social Justice Table contributed to a sense that Catalyst was discovering its niche. Beesing reflected:

> Catalyst's sweet spot is really capacity building but not capacity building in the traditional sense where we're working with other organizations so they can be better grant writers but capacity building in terms of being in this meso space where you're building the capacity of individuals to effectuate their own change. You're building the capacity of organizations to effectuate change. You're building the capacity of the community to be more resilient.

Thus, by 2012, the organization had developed a multi-pronged strategy to build capacity and resilience and advance social and economic mobility in low-wealth communities in Miami-Dade County. At one level, the organization aimed to build the capacity of individual families by providing and facilitating access to critical necessities. This was accomplished through The Prosperity Campaign, a multi-faceted service delivery effort that combined wealth and credit building (i.e., financial coaching and education, credit coaching, Free Application for Federal Student Aid (FAFSA) assistance, and IRS tax assistance); benefits enrollment (i.e., Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program, Temporary Cash Assistance, and Telecommunications); and health care access (this would evolve to cover Affordable Care Act navigation, low-cost/no-cost health care access, Medicaid assistance, KidCare assistance, and health coaching). At a second level, Catalyst ran a series of leadership empowerment programs and advocacy initiatives that prepared its clients to push for systemic reforms that could lead to broader change. An example of a leadership empowerment program was Public Allies Miami (an AmeriCorps apprenticeship that paired young adults with local nonprofits). Core advocacy efforts included Tallahassee Days of Action (an annual constituent trip that allowed clients to meet with members of the state legislature) and direct advocacy by Catalyst staff with local, state, and federal officials. Finally, Catalyst had established itself as a backbone organization across a robust network, The Social Justice Table. This allowed the organization to strengthen its advocacy voice, disseminate innovations to other groups, and learn from and build capacity in partner organizations.

2013 – 2016: A Leadership Transition and The Start of A New Era

By fall 2013, Cava felt that the organization had reached a point of stability where she could seriously consider transitioning to a new opportunity. "I was always thinking about how to make Catalyst sustainable," explained Cava, who identified the organization's historical dependence on episodic grants as one source of instability. "I felt there had been some really great breakthroughs, and I started thinking really the organization could probably withstand my leaving." Still, as Cava started to entertain this possibility, two questions loomed large: "What would I do, and who would run the organization?"[42] The latter topic was especially thorny because the organization was so deeply entwined with Cava's identity. As Gina Stabile, formerly the Chair of Catalyst's Board of Directors, said, "Daniella was Catalyst, and Catalyst was her."

Both questions came to the fore in fall 2013 when a local political activist approached Cava about the possibility of running to become a Commissioner for Miami-Dade County. To Cava, the opportunity was too good to pass up. She reflected, "This was my next calling. Immediately when he said it, I said, 'Yes I could do that. That would be worthy. The organization could survive.'" The next day, Cava shared the news with Beesing, Larson, and the rest of her leadership team and floated the idea of starting a search for her successor. Almost immediately, as Cava recalled, Beesing said, "'What about me?'" Looking back, Beesing—who had a nine-month old baby and had been working part time—mused, "I then immediately regretted saying that." Nonetheless, Beesing had a strong track record, having served as a social worker supporting victims of sexual assault and domestic violence in the Manhattan District Attorney's Office as well as in a variety of leadership positions at Catalyst Miami over the previous six years. What's more, she felt a call to

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42   Years earlier, when Catalyst was still known as HSC, Cava had received a small grant to invest in succession planning.

action and wanted to take the risk. Speaking of her successor, Cava reflected, "She's a bold person, and she's got a little rebelliousness in her, and it was like, 'Damn it, I could do this.' I said, "Yes, you can. Absolutely.'"

The Start of A New Era

Beesing became Catalyst Miami's CEO in November 2013, and after a two-month bridge period during which Cava stayed on in a senior advisory role, Beesing assumed full leadership of the organization in January 2014. In her first year as CEO, Beesing oversaw the launch of several new programs, including Catalyst's first-annual Poverty Solutions Summit.[43] Nevertheless, her primary focus in 2014 was preserving Catalyst's stability. This involved continuing to operate Catalyst's core programs, including The Prosperity Campaign, which had expanded to include financial coaching (e.g., training on approaches to budgeting and building credit) and helping clients navigate the Affordable Care Act.[44] Stabilizing the organization also entailed working with Larson and other senior staff to strengthen the organization's operations. Finally, Beesing met extensively with existing and prospective funders—including the Kresge Foundation, Allegany Franciscan Ministries, and JP Morgan—to build on the foundation that Cava had created. As Beesing explained, the organization—which was continuing to rely primarily on a mix of government contracts, corporate support, and grants from philanthropic foundations—was by no means unstable when she took over; however, "it could've become unstable very quickly if I didn't focus pretty intensely on maintaining and building new relationships with local philanthropy." She added, "The organization had been around for 18 years at that point, and it was very much identified with Daniella... When money was raised, they were donations for Daniella. Even a lot of the local grant-making that happened was based on the strength of Daniella's relationships."

"We hire people who are from the community and who look like the community, and that's a tremendous asset to us in the work that we're doing."

– Santra Denis
Chief Program Officer
Catalyst Miami

Promoting Racial Equity within Catalyst

By 2015, Beesing had made considerable progress reinforcing the organization's foundation and shifted the focus to leading more innovative work. Internally, this involved addressing an issue raised by the "T Team"—how Catalyst could do more to promote racial equity within the organization. The "T Team" began grappling with racial equity in the broader context of the Black Lives Matter movement. Mejia, a "T Team" member, explained, "There was a sense at the staff level that Catalyst...wasn't doing enough to be a part of the Black Lives Matter movement and that we were not living up to what we said we were as an anti-poverty organization working with communities of color and low-income communities." The T-Team therefore helped prepare a statement in support of the Black Lives Matters movement and also recommended that the organization do more to promote racial equity internally. This resonated with Beesing, who recalled thinking, "It hasn't been acknowledged, but it's probably a problem that the three senior-most people in the organization are white, and basically everybody else is a person of color. Nobody's said that to my face, but I have a feeling it's coming, so let's start talking about it now."

The organization engaged in a series of consultations and staff development opportunities—including a two-day staff retreat, monthly internal conversations, and movie screenings and educational events—focused on racial equity

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43   "An Intersectional Perspective on Well-Being"; and "Catalyst Miami History."

44   "Catalyst Miami," PowerPoint Presentation obtained from Catalyst Miami.

and related issues, such as housing and immigration. Beesing explained what she saw as the significance of these undertakings:

> The intention was to build shared political analysis among the staff because only about a third to half of the staff are in the public policy space. The rest…is doing more direct service work, so they don't have the same opportunities to take a step back and think about how racism, classism, and colonialism are shaping the systems that their clients are stuck in.

The trainings and consultations contributed to significant change, as Catalyst implemented mentorship programs, as well as a practice of posting job openings in networks where people of color were more likely to see them and apply. This contributed to a more inclusive C-suite team and enhanced the program team. "We hire people who are from the community and who look like the community," said Denis, Catalyst's Chief Program Officer, "and that's a tremendous asset to us in the work that we're doing." What's more, there was a broader sense that Catalyst staff were starting to grasp the complexities and significance of working on racial equity in Miami. Denis reflected, "I've always been very intentional about helping people understand poverty as a system and not as an individual, not in terms of individuals and their effort or lack of effort. In terms of the racial equity work that we're doing, it's helping people to see themselves in other folks." Finally, Catalyst's work on racial equity carried valuable lessons for how the organization should operate internally. As Mejia said, "We were very siloed in the way we were doing the social justice work." As a result, many staff within the organization did not know what Catalyst was doing to support other members of its network that were deeply committed to racial equity. "We were…basically doing everything that we could to uphold the work that was already happening by those organizations that were more specifically working on that issue," Mejia said, "but the rest of the organization didn't know that, because we didn't really have a good way to communicate, or to expand the work organization-wide."

Thus, Catalyst's work on racial equity did not just highlight the need to communicate about that issue specifically; it captured the need to communicate across the enterprise and the network more broadly. According to Beesing, it also demonstrated the importance of pursuing difficult topics and having the support and engagement of high-level leadership when doing so. "Talking about racism is hard in general," said Beesing, who noted that the topic was complex for Catalyst in part because of the diversity of the organization's staff, which included people from many different countries. "But," she continued, "it doesn't mean you don't do it." From her perspective, seeing high-level leadership

engaged and grappling with these topics and the historical context surrounding them helped other staff stay committed to these difficult conversations as well. "When you're uncomfortable," she concluded, "you have an opportunity to learn and grow."

Seeking Out New Terrain—Climate Justice

While Catalyst focused on strengthening its commitment to racial equity internally, it simultaneously strove to enhance its services, leadership programs, and policy advocacy efforts externally. This included continuing to augment The Prosperity Campaign through the introduction of lending circles and, with support from JP Morgan, building a "learning network for place-based change organizations."[45]

"Climate gentrification is not unique to South Florida. It just has a special face because the higher-elevation land is mostly occupied by low-income people of color."

– Gretchen Beesing
Chief Executive Officer
Catalyst Miami

Still, Catalyst's most significant programmatic shift during this time period involved responding to a growing concern from clients about the threat of climate change. One staff member recalled a client working in the agricultural part of Miami-Dade County who said that he sometimes put his hands in the soil and discovered water there. This contributed to a sense among the organization's staff that, as Beesing said, "our clients would be disproportionately impacted by climate change and sea level rise, and we wanted to explore the issue more deeply." At the same time, there was, as Beesing said, a zeitgeist forming in Miami, with different organizations—including The CLEO Institute, a non-profit focused on climate change education—working on global warming issues.

In 2015, Catalyst built on this momentum by co-founding The Miami Climate Alliance (MCA), "a coalition of organizations and individuals working to prioritize climate justice in South Florida."[46, 47] MCA quickly made a significant impact. It organized the Miami People's Climate March, a gathering of more than 800 participants that occurred in Miami and served as a "show of unity" before participants travelled to Tallahassee to propose "real climate solutions" to members of the state legislature.[48] In addition, the coalition mobilized more than 200 residents to lobby Miami-Dade County officials to create an Office of Resilience and a Chief Resilience Officer; this facilitated the development of strategies to mitigate the impact of climate change on the region.[49] "Sea level rise is an existential threat," said Jane Gilbert, who was hired as the City of Miami's Chief Resilience Officer in 2016. "But it is not an imminent existential threat … We have time to plan."[50]

Over time, the residents in low-income communities that MCA worked with also helped attune Catalyst staff to the significance of climate gentrification as an important—and easy-to-overlook—dimension of the larger problem of climate change. To Beesing's eye, this was a critical issue because, in an ironic twist, the land at the highest elevations in Miami-Dade County was primarily occupied by low-income, minority residents. Anticipating the washout of wealthier coastal residences, developers were therefore seeking to buy up the higher-elevation land but often not compensating current residents appropriately. Beesing explained, "Climate gentrification is not unique to South Florida. It just has a special face because the higher-elevation land is largely occupied by low-income people of color." Catalyst therefore

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45   "Catalyst Miami"; and "Catalyst Miami History"

46   Catalyst launched its climate resilience work with support from the Kresge Foundation. "Miami Climate Alliance," available at http://miamiclimatealliance. org (accessed on July 22, 2019); and "Catalyst Miami History."

47   The creation of the Miami Climate Alliance was yet another example of Catalyst Miami's successful establishment of networks bringing together different stakeholders. Another was the Miami-Dade Oral Health Network, "a network of key organizations and leaders within the county connected to issues of oral health and community engagement." For additional details, see "Activating Organizations and Networks To Fight Poverty," available at https:// catalystmiami.org/our-work/catalyze/ (accessed on July 24, 2019).

48   "Miami People's Climate March Demands Bold Action To Address The Effects of Sea Level Rise," Catalyst Miami, available at https://catalystmiami.org/ miami-peoples-climate-march-demands-bold-action-address-effects-sea-level-rise/ (accessed on July 22, 2019).

49   "Miami Climate Alliance," available at http://miamiclimatealliance.org (accessed on July 22, 2019).

50   Steve Baragona, "Miami Faces Future of Rising Seas," *VOA News*, November 2017, available at https://catalystmiami.org/miami-faces-future-rising-seas/ (accessed on July 22, 2019).

undertook efforts to educate residents in low-income communities about climate change and the value of their land. As Beesing told *The Wall Street Journal*, "As people move inland, we want to make sure there aren't waves of displacement."[51]

Some questioned whether Catalyst's move to enter the climate resilience space represented "mission creep." Beesing, however, pushed back forcefully against these assertions, arguing that Catalyst's work in this space—which, in addition to the People's Climate March and Miami Climate Alliance, also included a training program for community members— dovetailed perfectly with its mission.[52] She explained, "If Catalyst's position is to be the canary in the coal mine on behalf of low-income communities, and we see a problem [like climate change] that's going to disproportionately impact the people we serve, then it's actually not mission creep for us to start addressing climate change issues." Seen from this perspective, Catalyst's work on climate change issues further helped to clarify the organization's unique role as a backbone and convener in Miami-Dade County's social change ecosystem. Beesing explained:

> For Catalyst, there were important realizations that we had as a result of climate resilience becoming more central to our programming. One was that Catalyst isn't necessarily about the programs we operate. It's about the position that we take in the community, which is that we are here to understand and address issues that affect this particular subset of our community. Whatever we're doing on a day-to-day basis is almost secondary to the mission, which is really to build resilience in low-income communities, whatever that has to mean.

Thus, after undergoing a brief stabilization period following a momentous leadership transition, Catalyst had succeeded in unlocking new avenues for impact and further clarified its role in Miami.

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51   Arian Campo-Florida and Laura Kusisto, "On Higher Ground, Miami's Little Haiti Is The New Darling of Developers," *The Wall Street Journal*, April 22, 2019, available at https://catalystmiami.org/on-higher-ground-miamis-little-haiti-is-the-new-darling-of-developers/ (accessed on July 1, 2019).

52   The training program was called CLEAR Miami, an acronym that stood for "Community Leadership on the Environment, Advocacy, and Resilience." As the Catalyst Miami website explained, "CLEAR Miami focuses on climate resilience leadership and provides graduates with a groundwork to become climate resilience educators, leadership, and innovators in their own communities and beyond." For additional details, see "Catalyst Miami Launches Pioneering Climate Resilience Training in South Florida," August 9, 2016, available at https://catalystmiami.org/catalyst-launches-climate-resilience-training-south-florida/ (accessed on July 22, 2019).

2017 – 2018: Hurricane Irma, Strategic Planning, and Work With Local Government

The organization's work on climate change proved prescient in part because Miami soon faced a major environmental crisis—how to respond to Hurricane Irma, a severe storm that swept through the Caribbean and southeastern United States in fall 2017. Initially, reports suggested that the storm could make a direct hit on Miami, but it instead skirted South Florida, leaving Beesing to believe that the Catalyst office would close for a few days and evaluate its role in the response once it reopened. In a surprise move, however, staff voiced a strong interest in helping to lead the response to the storm, which was proving economically disruptive and therefore seemed intimately connected to Catalyst's focus on building resilience in low-wealth communities. Beesing was heartened by her staff's enthusiasm. "It wasn't top down," she said. "It was bottom up." She also was impressed that over the course of their response, many local organizations (including law firms and banks) began making unsolicited donations to Catalyst, something that, as Beesing said, had never happened before in her tenure but nonetheless served as a powerful vote of confidence. She reflected, "In that moment, I said, 'Okay, this is actually a testament to the work that we do in the community, that these partners see us as having our finger on the pulse of what's happening in the communities that were hardest hit by Irma.'"

Strategic Planning

Still, the greatest significance of Catalyst's role in the response to Hurricane Irma was that it helped to inform an ongoing strategic planning process about how to structure the organization's work. Catalyst had begun discussing the possibility of undertaking a new strategic planning process in 2016 and partnered with the TCC Group, an outside consulting firm, in early 2017 to lead a highly collaborative effort that drew on extensive conversations with staff, board members, funders, clients, and other stakeholders. As Beesing said, this dialogue played an integral role in helping Catalyst to map its ecosystem and where it fit, but the response to Hurricane Irma more concretely informed how the organization should structure its work moving forward. What struck Catalyst leaders was that much of the disaster

response included groups that were driving around communities in trucks hoping to drop off relief goods in areas of need. To complement this roving aid distribution (which, Beesing emphasized, was critical but likened to a game of whack-a-mole), Catalyst developed bases of support in a few community centers and spread the word that people could come for food, water, and ice; to complete FEMA applications; and to pre-register for disaster food stamps. "You need both," Beesing said, reflecting on Catalyst's stationary work and the roving work of other organizations. "It's a both-and situation."

As Catalyst then evaluated its role in the response, staff realized that the approach they had used dovetailed with a tactic they had discussed in more abstract terms during the strategic planning process: structuring Catalyst's work around a series of neighborhood-based efforts. Thus, in fall 2018, when Catalyst unveiled its new strategic plan, it announced a new focus on "resilience hubs" in five low-wealth communities in Miami-Dade County: Homestead/Florida City, Overtown, Little Haiti/Lemon City, Hialeah, and Miami Gardens.[53] The organization chose these locations because of their cultural and geographic diversity as well as the fact that Catalyst already had a footprint established and a foundation to build upon in each area. Importantly, this emphasis on resilience hubs did not replace the ongoing work of The Prosperity Campaign, which, as Beesing noted, was continuing on a county-wide basis. Rather, Catalyst augmented The Prosperity Campaign by continuing to provide existing services while equipping these areas to serve as "safe 'hubs' for times of crisis" (e.g., through the provision of generators and FEMA & Disaster food stamps) "and as a base of operations for building civic infrastructure."[54]

As the organization began this work involving five resilience hubs, it deployed a team led by Izegbe Onyango, Catalyst's Neighborhood Engagement Manager, to establish a dialogue with local residents about what their needs were and, in turn, how Catalyst should design services and solutions to support them. This approach reflected Catalyst's strong sense that it would not be productive, or appropriate, to enter these neighborhoods and act as though it had all of the answers. From Onyango's perspective, the strategy also led to an enjoyable dialogue in which local residents began making connections to one another and what was happening in their neighborhoods and, at the same time, Catalyst began grasping how it could function as a "force multiplier." Onyango concluded, "I must admit the part about talking to people and getting a sense of what's really important to them is just really refreshing." She also was heartened by the implicit understanding from the organization and funders that effecting deep change would take time and sustained focus. "When Catalyst said five years for these five hubs," Onyango said, "it was like a breath of fresh air. 'Oh, they get it.' This is not [going to happen] tomorrow."[55]

"The part about talking to people and getting a sense of what's really important to them is just really refreshing."

– Izegbe Onyango, Neighborhood Engagement Manager, Catalyst Miami

Work with Local Government

The resilience hubs also provided an opportunity to extend Catalyst's work with local government, albeit not without difficulty. Dating to its early years, Catalyst had had a multi-faceted relationship with Miami-Dade County and other local governments.[56] This included being a recipient of government grants, serving as a supplemental service provider, advocating for policy changes, and exploring deeper partnerships. Beesing explained, "What makes our relationship with government unique is that we are both a service provider they rely on, but we also have conversations with them about more in-depth collaboration... Because of our role developing leadership among the grassroots, we are occasionally a concerned advocate."[57]

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53 "Catalyst Miami Strategic Plan 2018 – 2023," obtained via a personal communication by e-mail with Gretchen Beesing, CEO, Catalyst Miami, on May 23, 2019.

54 "An Intersectional Perspective on Well-Being."

55 Interview with Izegbe Onyango, Neighborhood Engagement Manager, Catalyst, December 12, 2018.

56 As Beesing explained, Miami-Dade County has a county government as well as several dozen different municipalities inside the county that have different local governments, with separate funding streams and social service plans. There are also large pieces of the county that are unincorporated.

57 From Beesing's perspective, Catalyst's role as a direct service provider was especially important because "government providing their own services looks different in the southeastern United States than it does in other parts of the country. The direct service that government provides can be narrow and at least in the time that I've been in Miami since The Great Recession, it keeps getting cut."

The establishment of resilience hubs provided an opportunity for one of Catalyst's most in-depth government partnerships to date. Specifically, Catalyst developed a plan to work with the Miami-Dade County Community Action and Human Services Department to use County buildings in low-income communities as satellite offices where they would provide a mix of services to complement what the County already provided. In particular, Catalyst would offer financial services, hurricane preparation, disaster relief, and leadership courses; it would also work with the County to host events where local residents could meet elected officials. Beesing said, "That would be a very close partnership because they would be giving us free space and access to the space inside these buildings so that we could do all of that with them."

At the same time, the work on resilience hubs illuminated the challenges of partnering with local government— most notably that navigating government bureaucracies could be time-consuming and frustrating. In part because of this, as well as feedback they received from local residents, Catalyst was exploring the possibility of creating satellite offices in non-government buildings, such as churches, in some of the communities. To Beesing, this potential pivot illustrated a valuable lesson about how non-profits should approach collaborations. She said, "I think it's important to carefully vet any partner for a significant initiative, government included. And to make sure their own issues, let's say it's bureaucracy, are included in the design process."

2019: Impact, Evaluation, Culture, and The Path Ahead

The difficulty with the launch of the resilience hubs pointed to the fact that conceptualizing and implementing the strategic plan were two very different things. As Beesing said, the strategic plan had an excessive level of implementation detail that could prove overwhelming for staff and was also no longer relevant because conditions had changed since the plan was first created. Nonetheless, the plan as a whole—and the inclusive process that led to its creation—sharpened Catalyst's sense of direction and approach and also identified lofty goals for the organization to focus on, most notably impacting 50,000 community members by 2022 and, more broadly, working toward Catalyst's vision of "a just and equitable society in which all communities thrive."[58]

In 2019, as Catalyst began implementing the new strategic plan and working toward this vision, Catalyst's leaders and close advisors still saw room for growth. Evans, the University of Miami professor, highlighted the importance of making sure that Catalyst developed the staff capacity it needed to implement its vision for resilience hubs, just as it had had to refine its team to develop the capacity to build successful networks. Staff were also working to develop new programs to address community concerns, including HEAL Miami, a program that focused on addressing how Miami-Dade County's widening racial wealth gap was contributing to a deepening housing crisis.[59] Beesing and Stabile, the former board chair, identified securing new funding sources and diversifying Catalyst's funding base as another key priority. In 2018, Catalyst had an operating budget with approximately $3.74 million in expenses and $3.79 million in income; in 2019, those figures were projected to increase to approximately $4.38 million and $4.41 million, respectively. A combination

> *"We've always had this element of [being] willing to try things, and I think that experimental mindset, that willingness to see what works, lends itself to the learning aspect of the organization."*
>
> – Kristine Singer
> Chief Operating Officer, Catalyst Miami

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58 "Catalyst Miami Strategic Plan 2018 – 2023."

59 HEAL stood for "Housing Equity, Advocacy, & Leadership in Miami." This "leadership curriculum tackles this community-identified issue through racial and economic justice, health equity, and climate change frameworks." "An Intersectional Perspective on Well-Being."

of general operating grants, fundraising events, and a small consultancy contributed to the uptick in revenue.[60] Still, Beesing did not see this as a long-term solution. "That's not a very stable line of business," Beesing said, "but it helps plug holes." Rather, she felt the most important priority was securing more government grants. She believed that this would be especially integral to ensuring the stability of The Prosperity Campaign, which had depended on more precarious private financing. "There's buy capital and build capital," Beesing said. "Buy capital is the innovation money that comes in to start something. And build capital is your sustaining capital. We needed more of that... And really the best source of it, at least locally, for human services is government."

There was also a sense that the organization could continue to hone its program evaluation. In 2019, Catalyst added a Vice President of Evaluation and Learning, its first dedicated evaluation staff member. This reflected an ongoing effort to enhance Catalyst's evaluation work, which had initially focused on tracking outputs that were important to funders, evolved to consider outcomes, and now, many hoped, would begin to examine the combination of programs that were most effective. The emphasis, explained Kristine Singer, Catalyst's Chief Operating Officer, was "having a staff member dedicated to asking questions across the organization, [ensuring] standardization, and having someone to really look for trends in our data and us being able to then link our work to those things."[61]

A key part of the evolution in the program's evaluation strategy involved continuing to break down silos across the organization, determining how different programs affected clients, and figuring out how to maximize their experience across the enterprise. To that end, as Singer explained, the organization's new evaluation staff member was developing a database that connected clients' experiences with "milestone moments" (e.g., reaching a specific credit score or savings goal). The hope was that Catalyst could then identify patterns across the client population to understand more clearly what it would take to effect change on a community level. More broadly, the organization believed that the growing emphasis on data and evaluation would add another layer to a crucial cultural trait, being a "learning organization" that was comfortable taking risks. Singer said, "We've always had this element of [being] willing to try things, and I think that experimental mindset, that willingness to see what works, lends itself to the learning aspect of the organization that we're really naming now." Crucially, Singer added, this required "being open to what the data says because the data may not say what you want it to say, or what you're expecting it to say."

Even as room for growth remained, there were encouraging signs that the organization was making impressive progress toward its vision. From a pure numbers standpoint, the organization had grown to 32 employees and made an enormous impact—in 2018, Catalyst helped 5,443 clients access vital financial and health services, enrolled 268 participants in leadership development programs, and convened more than 700 residents for major events (e.g., the Anti-Poverty Summit and Social Justice Table).[62] This meant that, dating back to its founding, Catalyst had served more than 100,000 total residents through its direct service initiatives and leadership empowerment programs.[63] Still, the participants in Catalyst programs themselves spoke to something harder to quantify, the empathy, emotional support, and sense of empowerment that Catalyst provided. Jacquelin McClaurin, a Prosperity Campaign client, said, "They genuinely just took the time, and that meant so much to me, just somebody who really genuinely cared."[64] Yanick Landess, a participant in Catalyst's Parent Leadership Training Institute,

"They genuinely just took the time, and that meant so much to me, just somebody who really genuinely cared."

- Jacquelin McClaurin
Client, Catalyst Miami

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60   2018 and 2019 Operating Budgets for Catalyst Miami, obtained via a personal communication by e-mail with Gretchen Beesing on July 19, 2019.

61   Interview with Kristine Singer, Chief Operating Officer, Catalyst Miami, by telephone, June 7, 2019.

62   "Our Impact," Catalyst Miami, available at https://catalystmiami.org/our-impact/#impact_results (accessed on July 2, 2019).

63   "An Intersectional Perspective on Well-Being."

64   Interview with Francoise Cham and Jacqueline McClaurin, Clients, Catalyst Miami, December 13, 2018.

added, "There is nothing like knowledge and leadership skills to empower residents and to help them empower others. PLTI gave me that empowerment."[65, 66]

Finally, there was a sense that the organization was learning to strike a balance between action and reflection. In the past, Denis, the Chief Program officer, noted, Catalyst had often taken opportunities without fully considering bandwidth issues. "Sometimes we had already swam out from shore, and we said, 'Ok, we're just going to keep swimming.'" Now, however, the organization was employing planning grants and staff dialogue to gauge the viability of new opportunities. For example, Catalyst recently took on two large new initiatives, launching children's savings accounts for every student in Miami-Dade County Public Schools and a program for worker cooperatives.[67] Recognizing the scope of these initiatives, Catalyst chose to pass (at least temporarily) on another major opportunity, serving as a replication site for a payday lending program. "I don't really have the bandwidth to fundraise loan loss reserves," Beesing recalled thinking, "nor does the staff have bandwidth to implement what would be a really complex lending program when we're doing all of these other things."

The emphasis on pacing was one of several crucial ways in which Catalyst's approach to people and culture was continuing to change. Another, as Beesing said, was developing a more robust hiring and onboarding process, including having a team of staff review applications and do interviews and incorporating an emphasis on the organization's cornerstone values—including the importance of racial equity—in the onboarding process. Similarly, in an effort to increase cohesion, Catalyst introduced more staff activities, increased cross-programmatic sharing, and amplified staff training and development opportunities (including having local policy experts speak to all staff) so, as Beesing said, "staff are on more equal footing." Thus, Catalyst was continuing to build a culture that promoted equity, action, and collaboration.

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65   "Our Impact – Stories," Catalyst Miami, available at https://catalystmiami.org/our-impact/#impact_stories (accessed on July 10, 2019).

66   PLTI is a 22-week program that "engag[es] child advocates and parents in meaningful discussions about the health, safety, and education of youth." For additional details, see "Child Advocates Are Rising To Leadership In PLTI," Catalyst Miami, available at https://catalystmiami.org/child-advocates-are-rising-to-leadership-in-plti/ (accessed on July 10, 2019).

67   The work with the Miami-Dade Public Schools on children's savings accounts represented another in-depth partnership with local government. To aid in this endeavor, Catalyst hired a staff member who had previously worked for the City of Miami, the school district, and Miami-Dade County to serve as a guide within local government. Beesing explained, "There are some people that just understand really well how government works and can say, 'This is actually who you need to talk to.'" Beesing added that it is important to be "mindful in advance that governments can be very siloed and sometimes there are internal politics that are really impossible to understand from the outside. So if you can find someone to be your guide, that's helpful."

Yet even as the organization's approach to people and culture was evolving, its underlying commitment to promoting social and economic mobility and its methods for doing so did not. Beesing reflected on the durability of the organization's foundational approach:

> I think one of the things that's really interesting about Catalyst is that from the outside — and occasionally from the inside—it feels like we're always doing something different. But when you look at the nature of the work that we do, it's been the same for 24 years. We have a body of work around direct social services that I really think of as capacity building at the family level. And then we have a body of work around grassroots mobilization or activation, leadership development, and public policy advocacy. It's been both. Always. Now the way that we do each of those things changes sometimes faster than staff like, or frankly the community. It's not uncommon feedback for someone to say, 'I can't keep up with you guys.' Or, 'You seem to have your hands in everything.' That's sort of true, but the themes have been consistent since the organization was founded.

This points to some of the deeper lessons that lie in Catalyst's work. Cava highlighted the importance of reaching out to partners (e.g., the business community), even if their work might initially seem anathema to one's work. Beesing emphasized the benefits of taking chances, something that Cava helped her to appreciate. Beesing said, "I think it's hard to come by leaders that teach you it's okay to take risks and fail."

Finally, there was a sense that, through gradual but persistent relationship building, skill refinement, and visioning, an organization like Catalyst could carve out the unusual niche of serving as a backbone in an ecosystem and help to bring different groups together to effect change on a wider scale. For Catalyst, this journey was not complete, but it was not far from reaching escape velocity. As former board member Claire Raley concluded, "Catalyst is on the brink of greatness."[68]

"I think it's hard to come by leaders that teach you it's okay to take risks and fail."

– Gretchen Beesing
Chief Executive Officer, Catalyst Miami

In other words, the organization was approaching its tipping point and taking it by storm.

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68   Interview with Claire Raley, Senior Vice President, Community Development Officer, BankUnited, former board member, Catalyst Miami, December 12, 2018.

Catalyst Miami Case Study Discussion Questions

1. **Outcomes and Impact:** From its inception, Catalyst has done something extremely rare: facilitating access to services and support while simultaneously seeking to empower people and advocating for broader policy change. How did Catalyst develop this vision, and how has Catalyst sustained and enhanced this multi-faceted focus over time?

2. **Services and Solutions/Networks and Ecosystems:** How has Catalyst partnered with other organizations to create an ecosystem and networks to effect change? How has Catalyst developed the organizational capacity to lead these ecosystems and networks?

3. **People and Culture:** How has Catalyst's culture evolved so that it combines a sense of urgency with the recognition that sustaining and effecting large-scale change requires planning and patience?

4. **Racial Equity:** What strategies has Catalyst employed to advance racial equity? What lessons has the organization learned on this journey?

5. **The Environment:** How has Catalyst had to adapt to a unique environment in Miami, especially as it relates to the threat of climate change?

6. **The Path Ahead (Renewing Change):** What advice would you give to Catalyst's leaders as they attempt to leverage this "tipping point" and effect more ground-breaking change in the future?

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