

# **THE MOST RESULTS FOR THE LEAST MONEY**

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**A few ideas that  
may be worth funding**

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THE MOST RESULTS FOR THE LEAST MONEY  
PART I

**THE DINNER INITIATIVE** or the Common Ground (beef) Initiative

1. The Idea: Change depends on relationships. This initiative pays for dinner once a month for the state cabinet officials responsible for family and children services. In most states this is no more than three to five people. The theory is that if these people learn to know and trust each other the chances for real collaboration improve. If they have a place to share (good) ideas informally, the chances that some of those ideas become reality also improve. If someone buys them dinner once in a while, both things might happen.

2. How it would work: The Foundation agrees to pay for dinner once a month for up to 6 people - maximum of 5 cabinet officials plus one guest. No substitutions are allowed. No more than one guest is allowed. The Foundation only pays if (3 of 3; 3 of 4; 4 of 5; 5 of 6) show up. No exceptions. Payment can be made through a grant, or a credit card issued solely for this use. At the end of the year the group must produce two things: a group photo and a group statement. That's it.

3. Cost: Assuming 5 people @ \$40 per dinner, every other month the cost is \$1,200 per state. All 50 states and the District of Columbia come to \$61,200 (cheap). Add a county or city for \$1,200 each.

**THE FAMILY AND CHILDREN'S BUDGET INITIATIVE**

1. The Idea: Budgets are the most important policy documents. But traditional budget systems do a bad job of presenting policy choices about families and children. Budgets and budget shops are carved up along categorical lines. There is no place for the whole picture and the relevant choices to come together. This initiative pays for one person in the office of the State Budget Secretary, whose job it is to bring that picture and those choices together.

2. How it would work: Every state would be given a grant in return for a minimum application which promises to:

- Produce a printed Family and Children's Budget each year (released at the same time as the Governor's budget)
- An annual analysis of past expenditures and future trends in spending for family and children and
- An annual analysis of spending on prevention versus spending on "non-prevention" services.

The Foundation pays for the staff salary. The state pays for printing and other costs. The state must form or designate an advisory committee and agree to coordinate work with the Kids Count grantee. Half payment is made at the beginning of the fiscal year and half on presentation of the budget and analyses.

3. Cost: One staff @ \$50,000 including fringe benefits for all states and the District of Columbia comes to \$2,550,000 per year (not quite so cheap, but worth it).

## THE MOST RESULTS FORE THE LEAST MONEY PART II

### THE PRIZE

1. The Idea: In 1959, the Royal Aeronautical Society in London established a prize for human powered flight. It specified that the human contraption must fly a one mile figure eight course at least 10 feet above the ground. After years of effort and many attempts, a U.S. team with a plane called the Gossamer Condor finally won. When the Kremer prize was awarded in 1977 it was worth \$86,000. This prize differed markedly from prizes like the Nobel prize, which pick among the best of current accomplishments.\* This prize set a very specific goal and very specific measures of success, and let people figure out how to do it. It spurred activity and innovation for years far beyond what the prize money itself would buy in direct subsidized activity. As a departure from the traditional grant making process in human services, it would be interesting to create the equivalent of the Kremer prize.
2. How it would work: The Foundation would set out specifications for award of the prize, presumably related to transforming the well being of communities, families and/or children. It may be useful to have separate prize categories, for example, an urban neighborhood with diverse population, a rural area, a city, a county, etc. The general specifications could call for the community to identify outcome measures of the well being of families and children (perhaps in addition to specified "core" outcomes). The community must show either 50% improvement in all indicators from current levels (Half the distance to the goal line. Make it easy to articulate and remember that it should be a challenge!); or must achieve specified absolute standards (such as 2% low birthweight rate). The results and all analysis must be certified by a professional accounting or research organization. The first community to do it gets the money (period). No restrictions on how long it takes to get there or what they do with the money once they win (although a party for the kids and some new playground equipment would be a good start.)
3. Cost: Assuming two large (\$1 million) and two small (\$500,000) prizes, the total cost would be \$3 million. The only other costs would be planning costs and the review and award process itself. Applicants would pay all other costs, including the costs of the "certification." (It may be a wise precaution to pay someone to certify the certifiers; or maybe let the Royal Aeronautical Society administer the process.) Since it would probably take several years to get a winner, the cost could be amortized at about \$1 million per year, or less. The prize fund could also be set up as a kind of lottery with a prize amount which grew over time.

\*Still another idea would be a Nobel type prize for accomplishments on behalf of families and children; but this would tend to reward not cause change.

## THE MOST RESULTS PART III

### PLAYING THE GAMES CARD or THE POLICY GAMBIT

1. The Idea: People learn through play. In fact, play may be the most important way to learn. (Recognition of this is what separates Type A personalities from types B through Z.) Among the most important play technologies are games. It would be possible to pay some creative person or group (e.g. SSI Strategic Simulations Inc. of Sunnyvale CA) to produce and test a set of games designed to teach people how to:

- Work cooperatively on problem solving
- Understand the dynamics of the current system of services for families and children
- Experiment with ways to change the current system of services for families and children, or
- Get the most money for their agency and keep their jobs as long as possible

These would be different from past games such as those about the welfare system which have been used to make fun of such systems. Board games are one approach, but other gaming possibilities exist such as - computer simulations (like SimCity software or SSI software) or Group exercises, or Hot tub exercises. Some base of experience already exists in the Organizational Development field, and other experimentation is underway in the use of printed cards to teach family preservation and system reform concepts. One important spin off benefit - potentially the most important benefit - would be development of models which help envision / conceptualize social systems and how to change them. Games based on reality all require the creation of understandable representations of reality which can be manipulated. Simulations are already used as teaching tools in many professions. Professional game designers would bring an interesting new discipline to the consideration of social systems.

2. How it would work: The Foundation would give a grant requiring the creative person or persons to spend inordinate amounts of time in beautiful isolated settings developing said games. The Foundation would set aside time at its own conferences to test the games, or subsidize focus groups or workshops to do the same. After testing, the games could be used with state and local groups as part of Initiative activities. If well designed, the games could create a unique way to communicate with legislators and other policy makers.

3. Cost: Hard to say. A rough guess for a board game would be \$40,000 for design and testing and another \$10,000 for printing. A computer game could be significantly more expensive UNLESS a computer or game company donated the time and/or retained rights to the final product. Some costs may be associated with keeping games up to date, or refining the games as groups use them and give feedback on their design and usefulness. Other cost considerations involve how many games are to be designed; there are many possibilities. One could almost envision a Social Games Institute which collected, developed and supported the use of such tools.

## THE MOST RESULTS PART IV

### FRACTAL, FRACTAL ON THE WALL

1. The Idea: One of the reasons we fail at social change is because we don't really understand how social systems work. The new science of chaos and complexity has made remarkable progress in the last three years describing the behavior of complex, chaotic systems. The systems which have been used to illustrate this work come from a wide variety of traditional "fields," including mathematics, physics, astrophysics, biology, and economics. From the look of the literature, it appears that somewhat less attention has been paid to the social systems we are trying to change (certainly no slackers when it comes to chaos if not complexity.) In fact, the work on economics is just the tip of the iceberg of potential "applications" in social, political, and even ethical systems. (The Mandelbrot set, after all, could be viewed as a compelling picture of good and evil.) We need to connect with the people who are doing the work of exploring these powerful new ways of looking at the universe. One place to look for that connection is the Santa Fe Institute in New Mexico, a sanctuary turned Mecca for this field. In the simplest terms, we need to invest in some basic research and development for the social sciences. It is not possible to predict where this will lead. In a sense, that is a conclusion wholly consistent with the subject itself. But there may be no better use of money than an investment which will transform our ability to understand the problems we are trying to solve.
2. How it would work: Pay to release a butterfly in Tokyo on the off chance that it will reduce foster care caseloads in the United States. Pay the Santa Fe Institute to hold a conference on the subject of Chaos and Social Systems, Fractals and Foster Care, Teen Pregnancy and Strange Attractors. Fund a chair at the Institute, commission papers, computer models etc. Or, we could simply get ourselves connected to this thinking and see where it leads. Send a letter to the Director offering to do one of the above things. Set up a meeting as soon as possible. Fund a person to work there for a year. (I volunteer.) Do something...anything...but don't let this wait. Remember, initial conditions only knock once.
3. Cost: Who the hell knows. \$25,000 ought to be enough for a conference. \$100,000 ought to be enough for a position or parts of positions at the Institute. (The butterfly is free.) Maybe we could get them to come talk to us and draw us a picture, or make a proposal.



# THE MOST RESULTS: Part V

## A RECREATION ENTITLEMENT

1. **The Idea:** One of the reasons so many kids get into trouble is because they have nothing better to do. Fly into an American city on a warm summer afternoon and count the baseball fields. Now count the fields with children on them - few, if any. Where are the children? Children need and deserve recreation programs that are safe, affordable and close to home. Recreation is one of the cheapest, and maybe most effective, broad based prevention programs we can provide. It builds self confidence and self esteem. It builds leadership skills and a sense of responsibility. And it can build what we now know to be an essential bond between a child and a caring adult. And, after years of cutbacks and years of no children's policy and no urban policy, it seems to have disappeared from the urban, if not suburban and rural, landscape as a priority public service. It survives in the form of underfunded rec centers and fee-charging private leagues with seasons of short duration. What we need to do is to recreate recreation. We need some form of recreation entitlement for all children.

2. **How it would work:** One version of such a program could provide for 3 sports "seasons" (2 of 8 week duration and one of 12 week duration) covering 28 weeks of the year.

Basketball	Jan 15 to March 15	8 weeks
Baseball	May 1 to July 31	12 weeks
Soccer	Sept 15 to Nov 15	8 weeks

Every child could participate free of charge. The program would use full time recreation counselors to oversee leagues of 200 children, using volunteer coaches who would receive stipends of \$150 per season. Between seasons and during off time, the counselors could be attached to schools to supervise after school recreation, to provide a presence at parks and playgrounds and to support or organize other recreation activities. (A wholly different approach could employ vouchers to link children to a newly invigorated marketplace of supervised recreation.)

3. **Cost:** The cost per child would be about \$ 380 per year:

	Per season	Per year
Equipment and uniforms	\$ 50	\$ 150
Grounds/facility costs	25	75
Coaches fee	10	30
Recreation counselor (\$25k per 200 children)		125
Total		380

There are any number of ways to add to or cut this figure, but it is probably in the "ballpark." In a city of 1 million people, there would be about 150,000 children ages 7 to 17. Assuming 70% participation, the cost would be about \$40 million per year (less than 2.0% of the city budget). The program would create 600 direct jobs and a significant number of secondary jobs. (An equivalent national program would cost about \$10.3 billion - less than half of the 1994 crime bill - and create at least 200,000 jobs) If we can't afford a city wide effort, then go to the neighborhood level. A foundation could and give a first year grant of \$1 million to a neighborhood of 20,000 to set up a program for its 3,000 children. Over time, some of the cost may be recovered by reduced juvenile justice and child welfare expenditures. The long term savings and other benefits would be even greater.