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Health Care Coverage for the Uninsured (HCCU) Consensus-Building Initiative

Internal Evaluation

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ABBREVIATIONS & ACRONYMS

AG	Advisory Group
DME	Design, Monitoring and Evaluation
ESRI	Economic and Social Research Institute
FT	Facilitation Team
HCCU	Health Care Coverage for the Uninsured
HCCU-CBG	Health Care Coverage for the Uninsured Consensus Building Group
SFCG	Search for Common Ground
SME	Subject Matter Expert
TOR	Terms of Reference

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

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Consultant Biography

Marie N. Williams is the former Deputy Director of Search for Common Ground–USA, the domestic arm of Search for Common Ground. While at SFCG-USA Marie gained significant experience in consensus-building and was trained in Design, Monitoring and Evaluation. Marie applied her DM&E training to management of the collection and analysis of data for a U.S. Department of Justice –funded demonstration project in Philadelphia, PA. She conducted policy research, and recruited and facilitated bipartisan groups to generate agreement on broad principles and specific policies. She received her B.A. in Urban Studies and Sociology from Vassar College, and her J.D. from George Washington University’s National Law Center. Immediately prior to joining Search for Common Ground – USA, Marie was on the staff of the U.S. Chamber of Commerce Institute for Legal Reform where she drafted congressional testimony, published articles, and authored position papers on civil justice reform issues. Marie is active in a number of volunteer efforts, including acting as a Court Appointed Special Advocate for abused and neglected children in the District of Columbia and a volunteer mediator in Prince George’s County, Maryland.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The following is an overview of the evaluation of Search for Common Ground USA's Health Care Coverage for the Uninsured Consensus Building Process. It briefly describes the background, evaluation purpose, key findings and recommendations. The full detail of the evaluation conclusions are found in the body of the evaluation report.

Background

In 2004, Search for Common Ground-USA and partners Meridian Institute conducted an **assessment**, to ascertain whether, and under what conditions, it would be possible to conduct a consensus-building process on expanding health care coverage for the uninsured. The assessment confirmed that stakeholders were receptive to a consensus process, and that they saw the potential for developing policy options supportable across the political spectrum. As a result, Search for Common Ground and their partner Meridian Institute organized a **consensus-building process** to begin in the fall of 2004. Since October 2004, a 24-member group, comprised of leading organizations and individuals engaged on health care issues – representing a wide range of perspectives – met approximately once every two months in Washington DC to generate policy recommendations that could expand health care coverage for the uninsured. The final agreement among the remaining members, reached in November 2006, was embodied in a two-page statement of principles. Shortly before the public release of the agreement, several members of the HCCU-CBG began to meet without the facilitation team to work on an **implementation strategy** and plan to sustain the partnerships formed during the HCCC Process. These meetings continue today, as the members work to define new, more action-oriented goals.

Purpose of the Evaluation

This evaluation is intended to assess the process and the outcomes of the HCCU Consensus Building Process, and to identify lessons learned that could contribute to improving the application of consensus building as a tool to develop more effective and broadly supportable public policy.

The Findings

The report presents findings based on an analysis of the qualitative and quantitative data collected with a survey instrument, during interviews with stakeholders, and during a reflection session with the HCCU facilitation team (HCCU-FT). It is organized into **three parts**:

- A. An examination of the design, process and short term-results of the HCCU Consensus Building Process. Part A. also describes in more detail the activities leading up to and during the HCCU Consensus Building Process
- B. Findings related to the facilitation and management of the Process; and
- C. A consideration of the stakeholders' general perceptions about the consensus building initiative from the standpoint of lessons learned and implications for future consensus building exercises.

Findings Part A. The HCCU Consensus Building Process

- **Stakeholder Perceptions on Design and Process.** Stakeholders generally felt the process was well-designed with all due care and attention paid to factors such as logistics, meeting management; and openness on ground rules, objectives and discussion topics. High marks were given to efforts at making the HCCU-CBG inclusive of all relevant interests and positions. Although most acknowledged that there may

have been some constituencies that could have had greater (numerical) representation, an overwhelming majority felt that this ultimately had little impact on the validity of the Process. The review on stakeholder substantive input was similar, with a majority feeling that the process provided meaningful opportunities for everyone to give their input which was received respectfully by others. A relatively few stakeholders felt that some participants received favored treatment.

- **Stakeholder Perceptions on Policy Effects.** A majority of stakeholders were generally satisfied with the agreement, but a more significant percentage felt that it was politically realistic, regardless of their own personal level of satisfaction. The degree to which the agreement might be actionable was seen as being influenced more by the external context, specifically the political climate in Washington DC, than by other factors. The weight of opinion did not favor the single text approach used by the facilitation team, with most feeling that it was too lengthy and cumbersome a process that should have been halted sooner. Most stakeholders felt a sense of ownership over the final, shorter agreement.
- **Stakeholder Perceptions on Relationship Effects.** Almost all stakeholders gained new contacts as a result of the HCCU Consensus Building Process. A majority made new partnerships and just short of a majority reported having formed new relationships of respect and understanding. For those that did not form new relationships, or formed relatively few new relationships, previous relationships and networks were strengthened. All stakeholders reported that the positive effect on relationships was one of the most rewarding aspects of the Consensus Building.
- **Stakeholder Perceptions on Institutional Effects.** A relatively small percentage of stakeholders expressed the belief that the HCCU Consensus Building Process would have long-term effects on the way they do their work. Interestingly, however, almost all

expressed views that acknowledge that how they approached the HCCU-CBG was outside of the norm.

Findings Part B. Facilitation and Management of the HCCU Process

- **Stakeholder Perceptions on Facilitation and Management.** Stakeholders generally appreciated both the facilitation and management of the HCCU Process. Most displayed an awareness of the delicate balancing act that was necessary to ensure that the process moved forward, without individual participants feeling as though they were not heard, or that their concerns had not been addressed. Nevertheless, some participants, though very few did feel that the concerns were not addressed, and that the FT displayed unequal receptiveness to different perspectives, depending on whose perspectives they were. Stakeholders felt that the management of the HCCU Process could have been done with more communication from the FT, as well as greater clarification of roles and responsibilities among the various staff, as well as between the staff and the CBG.

- **Facilitation Team Self-Evaluation of Facilitation and Management.** The FT's self evaluation and reflection session demonstrated full awareness of how they were perceived by the CBG in general, as well as by unsatisfied CBG members in particular, in all aspects of the facilitation. They acknowledge that there may have been missteps at some points but deny that this was due to a lack of expertise in the subject matter. The FT saw the mistakes as being mainly related to the use of the SMEs and a lack of clarity of their role in supporting the CBG. Where management of the process is concerned, the FT believed that most decisions were supported by the changing circumstances of the Process, though not always adequately communicated to the CBG and former members of the AG. Even acknowledging the technical and other difficulties faced by the organization during the project, the FT generally agreed that at times, SFCG could have been more transparent about the budget and funding situation.

Findings Part C. General Perceptions and Lessons Learned

- **Stakeholder General Perceptions.** Almost all stakeholders, when given the opportunity to discuss general impressions of the HCCU Process spoke in positive terms of three things: i) the sense of moral purpose in the HCCU Process that does not always exist in other Washington DC policy discussions; 2) the apparently unprecedented willingness by most groups to compromise for the benefit of the whole; and 3) the potential of the Process to impact future policymaking efforts inside the Beltway.

Conclusions and Recommendations

The full detail of conclusions on whether the HCCU Process met the process and outcome criteria is found in the body of the evaluation report. The following are recommendations – based on stakeholder feedback and the evaluator’s analysis of that feedback – for Search for Common Ground USA to consider in future consensus building processes.

Design and Process

- 1) Fully discuss how criteria for membership are developed and share with participants the values, competing interests and constraints involved in constituting the consensus building group.
- 2) Be attentive to domination of discussions by certain interests or participants and take ameliorative measures to ensure that group dynamics do not determine outcome.
- 3) Emphasize the responsibility of all stakeholders to participate fully in the process, including being adequately prepared for meetings and maintaining continuity of attendance.
- 4) Set and follow ground rules that clarify subcommittee and task force powers and responsibilities.

- 5) Pay close attention to cues of the consensus building group during negotiations to ensure that they understand and continue to support techniques utilised to produce a positive outcome.
- 6) Consider offering stakeholders a primer or mini-training in consensus building to provide a framework for the process that are about to participate in.

Facilitation and Management

- 7) Clarify roles and responsibilities among facilitation team members and between FT and SMEs at the process design stage of the project.
- 8) Manage budget and financial issues like process issues – making long range and contingency plans, establishing boundaries and clarifying roles of all members of the management team.
- 9) Distinguish between funding and management, and act with a greater degree of transparency on budget and finances when stakeholders are also donors to the project.

General Perceptions and Lessons Learned

- 10) Build on relationships and partnerships formed to extend buy in for policy consensus processes beyond the direct participants in the HCCU Process.

INTRODUCTION

SFCG Background

Since 1982, Search for Common Ground, an international non-governmental organization, has been working to transform the way the world deals with conflict: away from adversarial confrontation, toward cooperative solutions. Our philosophy is to “understand the differences,” but “act on the commonalities.” SFCG is engaged in a long-term process of incremental transformation, so we make long-term commitments. We seek cross-cultural integration of indigenous and international concepts of conflict prevention, and work with partners on the ground to strengthen local capacity to deal with conflict. SFCG currently works in or with fifteen countries: Angola, Belgium, Burundi, D.R. Congo, Greece, Indonesia, Iran, Liberia, Macedonia, Middle East (with offices in Jerusalem and Amman), Morocco, Sierra Leone, Turkey, Ukraine, and the USA. Our “toolbox” includes mediation/facilitation training, community organizing, radio/TV, journalism, sports, drama, and music.

The mission of Search for Common Ground-USA is to foster cooperation among people who have different views on how to achieve social progress and to encourage the use of cooperative approaches as a first option for addressing differences. We bring diverse stakeholders together to build consensus solutions to specific, important issues at the national, state and local levels; and we build institutions that foster cooperation and consensus building over time. A hallmark of our work is that we not only foster dialogue and understanding but also engage groups to take actions that serve their shared interests.

The United States Consensus Council (USCC), a diverse, bi-partisan leadership group, serves as a steering committee for the policy consensus and related work of SFCG-USA. Members of the Council include former U.S. Senators, Representatives, Cabinet Officials and Diplomats; former Governors and Mayors; and other leaders from law, business, politics and the non-profit sector.

Background of the HCCU Consensus-Building Process

In 2004, Search for Common Ground-USA and partners Meridian Institute conducted an assessment, to ascertain whether, and under what conditions, it would be possible to conduct a consensus-building process on expanding health care coverage for the uninsured. The assessment confirmed that stakeholders were receptive to a consensus building process, and that they saw the potential for developing policy options supportable across the political spectrum. As a result, Search for Common Ground and their partner Meridian Institute organized a consensus-building process to begin in the fall of 2004.

Since October 2004, a 24-member group, comprised of leading organizations and individuals engaged on health care issues – representing a wide range of perspectives – met approximately once every two months in Washington DC to generate policy recommendations that could expand health care coverage for the uninsured.

The primary difference between a consensus building process and traditional policy negotiation is in the diversity of perspectives represented and the effort to find solutions that satisfy all major interests. Parties, including those with conflicting views, were invited to clarify their disagreements, define the issues, and work collaboratively to find equitable solutions in a skillfully facilitated process.

The goal of the consensus building process was to reach widely supportable recommendations that stakeholders work actively to implement in public policy and other arenas. In November

2006 an agreement was reached on principles that could be the basis for initiatives to expand health insurance coverage to as many people as possible as quickly as possible. Bi-partisan legislation, influenced by the group's agreement, is currently under consideration by members of Congress.

Evaluation Criteria and Limitations of the Evaluation

The most common criterion used to evaluate consensus building is whether or not the process produced an agreement, and an inquiry into the quality of that agreement. This approach however, runs the risk of failing to capture more nuanced results. If the goal of any consensus building exercise is to “help organizations and communities adapt constructively and creatively to issues they face and the larger context in which they operate” an evaluation must necessarily assess whether the consensus building exercise left the stakeholders better positioned to do so. (Innes, 1996) This means evaluating not only the outcome (i.e., the agreement), but the nature of the process itself.

Some criteria suggested by the literature for evaluating consensus building processes are:

- i. Representative of all relevant and different interests
- ii. Driven by a practical purpose shared by the group
- iii. Adapts to and incorporates high-quality information
- iv. Encourages participants to challenge assumptions
- v. Keeps participants at the table, interested and learning
- vi. Seeks consensus only after discussion and exploration of different interests

A “good” consensus building process need not meet every one of these criteria, but rather, they offer a guide, or general standards which most effective processes will have no trouble meeting.

Outcomes – both short and longer term results – are measured against different criteria, including:

- i. Produced a high-quality agreement
- ii. Ended Stalemate
- iii. Compared favorably with other planning or decision-making methods
- iv. Produced feasible proposals and creative ideas for action
- v. Stakeholders gained knowledge and understanding
- vi. Created new working relationships and political capital
- vii. Produced new information and analyses accepted by stakeholders
- viii. Produced outcomes regarded as serving the common good or public interest

The evaluation of the HCCU Consensus Building Process was designed to assess many of the abovementioned criteria with the following caveats: 1) It is too soon to evaluate any potential long term outcomes (or impacts) of the HCCU Consensus Building Process. 2) The evaluation does not independently assess the quality of the product of the HCCU Consensus Building Process (i.e., the agreement) but rather, assesses the nature of the process used to arrive at that agreement, and the satisfaction of the stakeholders with the process and the agreement.

(Evaluation criteria excerpted from: the Consensus Building Handbook: a Comprehensive Guide to Reaching Agreement, Eds. Susskind, McKearnan & Thomas-Larmer)

Structure of the Report

The report begins with an **Executive Summary** and an **Introduction to the HCCU Consensus Building Process**. The evaluation results and analyses are presented in the **Findings** section, which is divided into three key parts. The section on **Conclusions and Recommendations** is the final section and follows the structure of the Findings section to identify corresponding conclusions and recommendations. **Appendices** to the report are presented in a separate document.

EVALUATION METHODOLOGY

This evaluation was commissioned by Search for Common Ground USA (SFCG-USA) in order to assess the process and the outcomes of the HCCU Consensus Building Process. This section outlines the intended audience of the evaluation, its scope, approach, and evaluation objectives. The final part of this section describes the key steps and tasks, as well as the tools used to collect data.

Public policy conflicts, particularly those of concern to large segments of the public, are often very costly, protracted and complex. Such conflicts present both challenges and opportunities. How can we best design efforts to resolve them? Consensus building has been acknowledged as a model with some adaptability for application to complex conflicts, and is believed to have significant potential.¹

But how can this be demonstrated? Once we have designed and initiated a consensus building process, how can we understand and demonstrate its effectiveness? What can we learn from past and present consensus building efforts that might prove useful in the future?

Intended Audience

The main audience for this evaluation is Search for Common Ground, the stakeholders in the HCCU Consensus Building Process, the facilitation team (see appendix 2 for full list) and to a limited degree, the general public.

¹ Elliott, Michael, Tamra Pearson d'Estree, and Sandra Kaufman, *Evaluation as a Tool for Reflection, Includes a discussion of "the Role of Evaluation in Resolving Intractable Conflicts," "Why is evaluation particularly important in intractable conflicts?" "Evaluation's Uses," "What Constitutes Success," "Challenges of evaluation in intractable conflicts," and "How do you conduct an evaluation?"* In its conclusions, it includes a useful chart matching types of evaluations to objectives, audiences, purposes, means, outcomes, and who conducts the evaluation. Available at: <http://www.intractableconflict.org/m/evaluation.jsp>.

Scope

This evaluation is intended to assess the process and the outcomes of the HCCU Consensus Building Process, and to identify lessons learned that could contribute to improving the application of consensus building as a tool to develop more effective and broadly supportable public policy.

Evaluation Objectives

This evaluation has three key objectives, which will make up the three different components of this report.

Objective A: Examination of the design and process and identification of its short term results, including:

1. Policy Effects:

- Sustainability of agreements reached
- Breadth of buy-in for the final agreement
- Likely policy impacts of the process

2. Relationship Effects:

- Relationships among participants
- Sustainability of relationships established
- Other immediate outcomes and likely social capital impacts
- Collaborations that occurred that otherwise would not have

3. Institutional Effects:

- Development of sustainability mechanisms

- Development of actionable agreements or an implementation strategy
- Likelihood of future working relations

Objective B: Effectiveness of the facilitation and management, including:

- Understanding of underlying interests
- Appropriateness of process
- Management of the process
- Staffing levels
- Fundraising strategy and relationships
- Meeting facilitation
- Adaptability of the facilitators to changing contexts
- Facilitators' relationships with stakeholders

Objective C: The third part of this evaluation is to document and describe the general nature of the process itself in the context of lessons learned and challenges for future policy consensus building processes.

Research Framework

At an early stage of the evaluation process, the consultant with the assistance of SFCG's DME specialists developed an evaluation framework that outlined key research questions; which stakeholder group each question related to; which tools would be used when, and the response format (appendix 4).

The stakeholders for this evaluation included:

- The participants in the process (a total of 24 people representing 16 organizations)
- The facilitation team
- Subject matter experts

See appendix 2 for a full list of stakeholders.

Data Collection Tools

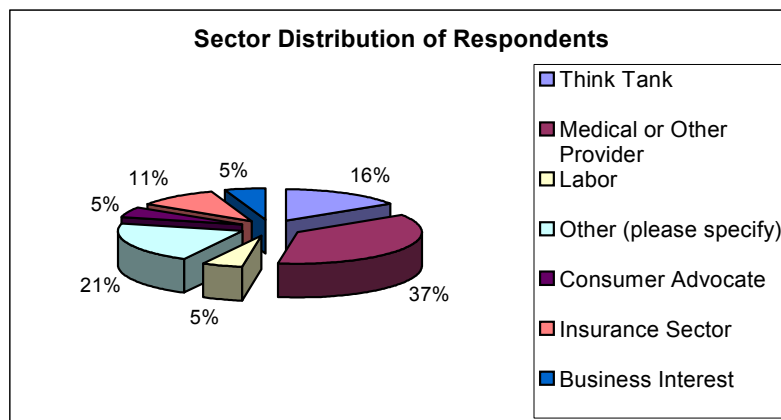
A mixed qualitative and quantitative approach was taken to collecting the data. Three different tools were developed based on the research questions mentioned above; they included a survey, in-depth interviews and a reflection session with process facilitators.

Survey

A questionnaire, with closed and open questions, was designed and posted on the online survey provider www.surveymonkey.com to allow easy access to all stakeholders. The full questionnaire is available in appendix 5.

The survey was posted for a period of three months and 21 participants completed the survey. Although this exercise did not aim for statistical significance, the high response rate makes it representative of the views of all participants.

Figure 1. below shows the distribution of sectors/interests in the HCCU Consensus Building process that responded to the survey.



In-depth Interviews

In-depth semi-structured interviews were conducted with four key informants purposefully selected based on their advisory role during the process. In addition to key informants, six participants were interviewed using the same tool; their selection was weighted (per category) and random. See appendix 6 for the full interview guide. Transcriptions of the interviews were verbatim.

Reflection Session

The final tool developed was the guide to a two-hour discussion facilitated by one of SFCG's DME specialists to ensure objectivity. The aim of this structured conversation with the process Director and facilitators was to reflect on the design of the project; the key results obtained; critical factors in the planning and implementation and lessons learned from the experience. See appendix 7 for Discussion Guide.

FINDINGS

This section of the report presents findings based on an analysis of the qualitative and quantitative data collected in the survey instrument, interviews with stakeholders, and during a reflection session with the HCCU facilitation team (HCCU-FT). It is organized into **three parts**:

- A. An examination of the design, process and short term-results of the HCCU Consensus Building Process. Part A. also describes in more detail the activities leading up to and during the HCCU Consensus Building Process
- B. Findings related to the facilitation and management of the Process; and
- C. A consideration of the stakeholders' general perceptions about the consensus building initiative from the standpoint of lessons learned and implications for future consensus building exercises.

Findings Part A: The HCCU Consensus Building Process

Process Design, Stakeholder Selection and Activities

The HCCU Consensus Building Process began with the hypothesis that the issue of health care coverage for the uninsured (HCCU) in the United States might be effectively addressed through a series of facilitated policy discussions involving political elite representatives of all the major perspectives on the issue. To test this hypothesis, a **conflict assessment** was conducted, during which over 40 potential stakeholders were interviewed about the issues surrounding HCCU, and the likely success of a consensus building process, should one be initiated. The **assessment team** consisting of SFCG-USA staff and their partners at the Meridian Institute was guided by the input of an **Advisory Group (AG)**, led by a leading health care consumer advocacy group and the non-profit arm of a major health care provider. Other members of the AG were primarily health care industry and opinion leaders from the Washington DC area who shared the goal of organizing a consensus building process. The assessment – conducted over several months in cities across the

United States – concluded that the “zones of consensus” were sufficiently compelling to warrant the organization of a multi-stakeholder policy consensus building process.

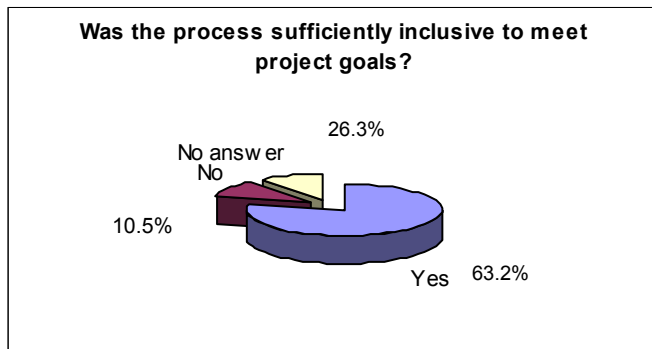
With the guidance of SFCG-USA and Meridian Institute staff members (now collectively called the **facilitation team**) the Advisory Group chose prospective members of the HCCU Consensus Building Group (HCCU-CBG). Among the group of organizations and individuals ultimately selected, there were ten sectors represented; each corresponded with the major interests identified during the conflict assessment. A number of factors influenced how many representatives from each sector were invited to participate, with particular emphasis on the goal of fostering ideological and political balance. Upon commencement of the process, the Advisory Group was dissolved into the plenary group to preserve equality among participants.

The HCCU Consensus Building Process consisted of a series of meetings (*i.e.*, the **negotiation or deliberation phase**) between 1-2 days in length, over a period of 24 months. As the complexity of the discussions grew, conference calls and subcommittee meetings were held, after which the plenary group was given recommendations to inform key discussions and decisions. Since the members of the HCCU Consensus Building Group came to the table with different and often significantly divergent sources of information, **subject matter experts** (SMEs) from the Economic and Social Research Institute (ESRI) were retained. The purpose of enlisting their services was twofold: 1) to create a single shared information base for the group; and 2) to produce a **single-text negotiation instrument** that would form the basis of the agreement to be ratified by the whole group. In addition, The Lewin Group was hired to perform cost modeling, projecting costs of policy and legislative proposals developed by the HCCU-CBG. Neither ESRI nor the Lewin Group were viewed as part of the facilitation team, but rather were presented as additional staff support to the Consensus Building Group.

At various points during the deliberation phase, members from various interests dropped out of the process. Reasons cited by drop-outs were an inability to sign on to specific recommendations

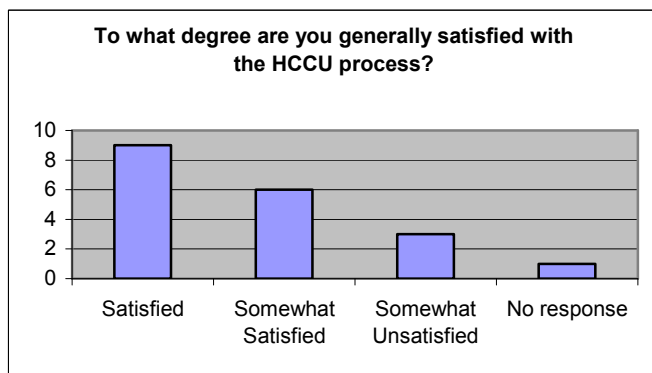
agreed on by a majority of members, an unwillingness to create a logjam to the group reaching consensus, and general dissatisfaction with some aspects of the process. As the HCCU-CBG neared the end of their negotiations, they decided not to publicly release the single-text instrument developed with ESRI's assistance. Instead, the final agreement among the remaining members, reached in November 2006, was embodied in a two-page statement of principles. Shortly before the public release of the agreement, several members of the HCCU-CBG began to meet without the facilitation team to work on an **implementation strategy** and plan to sustain the partnerships formed during the HCCC Process. These meetings continue today, as the members work to define new, more action-oriented goals.

Stakeholder Perceptions on Design and Process



A significant majority of stakeholders (79%) in the HCCU Consensus Building were generally satisfied with the process, giving particularly high marks to the overall logistical management of the meetings and facilitation. Most were able to accurately articulate the process

objectives, and all respondents (surveyed and interviewed) believed those objectives to be either



feasible or "somewhat feasible." With regard to how the group was constituted, most respondents (63.2%) felt that the membership was sufficiently inclusive to meet those objectives. This is particularly significant since participants interviewed unanimously gave the highest importance

rating to having a broad spectrum of stakeholders in order for the process to have a significant result. Interviewees (contrasted with all participants *surveyed*) also placed a particularly high

premium on having the appropriate individuals with the right decision-making authority engaged, and all believed that this was successfully accomplished in the organization of the HCCU Process. A few stakeholders rated themselves somewhat unsatisfied (16%) with the process and the degree of inclusiveness, citing reasons that included a perceived “imbalance” of interests and the sense that some participants exercised an “overwhelming influence” over the facilitators and some aspects of the process.

Stakeholder Comments on Inclusiveness

“In terms of being able to move towards consensus, we had the right people. People who were there ably represented their organizations. There could have been more groups represented but the basic spectrum was represented.”

“The group was imbalanced. If the business and insurers were more balanced [in terms of numbers] with others, [the outcome] might have been different.”

“For me . . . it was one of a kind. I have never sat at a table with that goal with that many groups of people.”

On specific process points, the stakeholders have mixed but generally positive reviews: an overwhelming majority of 84% was satisfied or somewhat satisfied (an additional 5%) with their level of input on ground rules; and a similar number was satisfied (74%) or somewhat satisfied (16%) with their input on objectives. There was a slight difference in the level of satisfaction with input on discussion topics however, with only 56% of participants reporting that they were satisfied with this aspect of the process, and another 26% rating themselves as somewhat satisfied. At least one respondent acknowledged that they may have been more satisfied with their level of input because they were part of the Advisory Group, but qualified that statement by saying that “you can’t function without some smaller group leading” and explaining that even where other groups may have perceived an imbalance “it wasn’t enough to cause them to leave.”

Regarding how they viewed other participants' input, as opposed to their own, most believed that the opportunity for full and equal participation was there, complicated mostly by the tenacity of some participants when trying to get support for their perspectives – a “squeaky wheel phenomenon” as one interviewee put it. Another described the issue of input this way: “It seemed to me that everyone had an opportunity and everyone was heard respectfully. Some people had a perspective that . . . they couldn't let go of for a bit but it did not compromise the process.” This is echoed in the survey results which reflect that 73.7% of respondents felt that there was an adequate degree of respect from participants for different positions than their own, even though relatively few (23.5%) reported that this resulted in a change in their understanding of those other positions and perspectives. Another factor that some respondents cited as having an impact on the quality of their own and other participants' input was the tendency by some groups to have “a lack of continuity” regarding who represented them at meetings, so that “people who had not been intimately involved in the process brought up issues that had already been discussed – almost like they were new.”

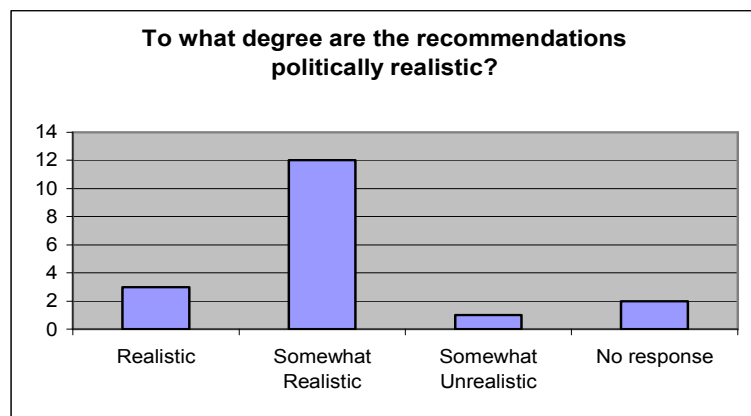
- **SUMMARY: Stakeholder Perceptions on Design and Process.** Stakeholders generally felt the process was well-designed with all due care and attention paid to factors such as logistics, meeting management; and openness on ground rules, objectives and discussion topics. High marks were given to efforts at making the HCCU-CBG inclusive of all relevant interests and positions. Although most acknowledged that there may have been some constituencies that could have had greater (numerical) representation, an overwhelming majority felt that this ultimately had little impact on the validity of the Process. The review on stakeholder substantive input was similar, with a majority feeling that the process provided meaningful opportunities for everyone to give their input which was received respectfully by others. A relatively few stakeholders felt that some participants received favored treatment.

Stakeholder Perceptions on Short-Term Results

Three types of short-term results of the HCCU-CBG Process were examined: i) policy effects, including sustainability and buy-in; ii) relationship effects among participants and the likely social capital impacts; and iii) institutional effects, such as organizations incorporating lessons learned in the Consensus Building Process and the effect on the likelihood of future collaboration.

i) Policy Effects

Sixty-four percent of survey respondents indicated that they were satisfied with the agreement that was reached at the end of the negotiations but satisfaction notwithstanding, a significantly greater percentage (88.2%) felt that the agreement is either politically



realistic or somewhat politically realistic. Those who were either not satisfied with the agreement, or felt that it was not sufficiently actionable, cited reasons such as political gridlock in Washington DC and the absence of accompanying cost estimates for the proposals.

Overwhelmingly, respondents point to the external political context as a key factor influencing whether the principles agreed to by the Group will be acted upon. The second most cited potential influence was the ability and likelihood of the members of the HCCU-CBG sticking together to advocate for the recommendations. As one interviewee put it, "The political realities ultimately dictated the solutions. What makes it more feasible is the strength and credibility of the members of the HCCU workgroup." Some respondents (35.3%) appear to endorse the view that the "political realities dictated the solutions", finding them "somewhat uncreative" but a majority (53%) felt that the recommendations were creative or somewhat creative. Of those who participated in the in-depth interview, and who remained with the Process throughout, there was

a clear sense of buy-in toward the resulting agreement, and none expressed serious dissatisfaction with the final product. A few interviewees expressed ambivalence - and many expressed outright impatience – about how time-consuming it was to negotiate over and produce the longer (and eventually discarded) single-text document that was expected to be the preliminary agreement of the HCCU-CBG. While some acknowledged that this may have been a necessary step to reach the ultimate result, others felt that the FT failed to recognize sooner that the approach would not succeed.

Stakeholder Comments on Single Text Process

“We made a decision to jettison too much detail and it was the consensus of the group to create a framework rather than getting deep into the weeds of the detail.”

“I got aggravated. If you are foolish enough to think that [legislation] that comes will use our language, you’re nuts . . . let’s just get the concept and then move on to the next thing.”

“This is one of the challenges of the process. There was a sense of frustration that the words of the [long] document and some of the details did not accurately represent the consensus opinion.”

“The longer document got bogged down. It highlighted the fissures as opposed to highlighting the commonality [but] it’s easy to go down that road because you want to solve all these problems.”

“I disagree that it was a waste of time. You can’t have an actual agreement on a short document. We had to go through the long document or we never would have reached agreement . . . [P]eople would have kept asking ‘what does that mean?’”

Despite frustrations about the single text process, of all the interviewed participants, only one rejected both ownership of the agreement and the form it ultimately took, in part on the basis of the process that was used to arrive at it, saying, “It glazed over so many nuances. It was so bland and nondescript. *Finding consensus was the end all and be all.* There was a sizeable contingent of us that thought that in watering it down to come up with an executive summary it could be interpreted so many ways by so many people. It was written in such a way that there was not a

lot of *there* there. The fact that we got a bland proposal says something about the process.” Other interviewees who do not claim ownership of the final agreement were careful to emphasize that this speaks more to the nature of their organization and the capacity in which they participated in the HCCU-CBG than it does about their opinion of the result. As one interviewee explained, “We support the final agreement. We went into this with the intention of not signing on as an official signatory, [but] this is just the nature of our membership.”

ii) Relationship Effects

Ninety-four percent of survey respondents reported having gained new contacts as a result of their participation on the HCCU-CBG, and 53% said that the consensus building process enabled them to form new partnerships. Relationships short of “partnerships’ but nevertheless of greater understanding and respect were formed by 47% of survey respondents. Among the stakeholders interviewed, most reported that few of the other participants were unknown to them at the beginning of the process, but that the shared experience significantly strengthened those relationships.

A majority of interviewees were able to cite at least one example of the positive effect that their participation in the HCCU process had on their relationships with other participants. Most notably, one group that did not sign on to the final agreement and that left the process before its completion acknowledged that they had been able to develop “very good relationships at the table” and that it not only “opened up networks, but strengthened them.”

Stakeholder Comments on Relationships

“The personal relationships built were probably the most beneficial part of the process.”

“There was a giddiness at the end, posing for photos like at summer camp. I’ve never seen that before with these people.”

"I wouldn't say new [relationships]. [The process] changed the trust level that existed among organizations that are traditionally policy opponents and enabled the relationships to be richer in content in a way that allows frank conversations toward a productive end."

iii) Institutional Effects

Despite the positive relationships developed by most participants, relatively few of those interviewed (one-third) believed that the HCCU Process would lead to significant changes in the way they approach their work. Only one interviewee credited the HCCU Process as giving them a new way to look at facilitated policy discussions for the future. Nevertheless, it appears from a compilation of comments from the interviews and surveys alike that this view is somewhat myopic, and that the Process may have already changed the way that many participants work, or at least how they view their future work, as evidenced by some of their comments:

On how health care issues will be approached from now on: *"In this particular area of health care there is a tectonic shift and there is a break of usual established positions. We are seeing organizations open to thinking differently about the way health care operates."*

On how much ownership they will claim of the outcome: *"We have 1/16th ownership and we are happy it is not more because it wouldn't be appropriate. We shared the process . . . but we have no more ownership than anybody else."*

On applying a new approach to the HCCU Process than to other previous discussions: *"I was asked to come to the table ready to accept Plan B and not [necessarily to] get Plan A in there. There were clearly diverse parties and an upfront expectation that you were not there to sell your plan."*

On the importance of maintaining cohesion: *"I think everyone thought it was important not to break ranks . . . [and] by the end we were so invested that we wanted to protect the integrity of the process."*

In addition to having a possible impact on the way many participants may view their work in future, the interviews revealed that participants have maintained contact and continue to work together independent of the FT, planning for implementation and engaging in other joint activities, including lobbying for new legislation. One participant put it this way, “We have taken this agreement and created a coalition, and we are working together, and there will be a lot more outputs on this agreement. The agreement was not a one-night stand.”

- **SUMMARY: Stakeholder Perceptions on Policy Effects.** A majority of stakeholders were generally satisfied with the agreement, but a more significant percentage felt that it was politically realistic, regardless of their own personal level of satisfaction. The degree to which the agreement might be actionable was seen as being influenced more by the external context, specifically the political climate in Washington DC, than by other factors. The weight of opinion did not favor the single text approach used by the facilitation team, with most feeling that it was too lengthy and cumbersome a process that should have been halted sooner. Most stakeholders felt a sense of ownership over the final, shorter agreement.

- **SUMMARY: Stakeholder Perceptions on Relationship Effects.** Almost all stakeholders gained new contacts as a result of the HCCU Consensus Building Process. A majority made new partnerships and just short of a majority reported having formed new relationships of respect and understanding. For those that did not form new relationships, or formed relatively few new relationships, previous relationships and networks were strengthened. All stakeholders reported that the positive effect on relationships was one of the most rewarding aspects of the Consensus Building.

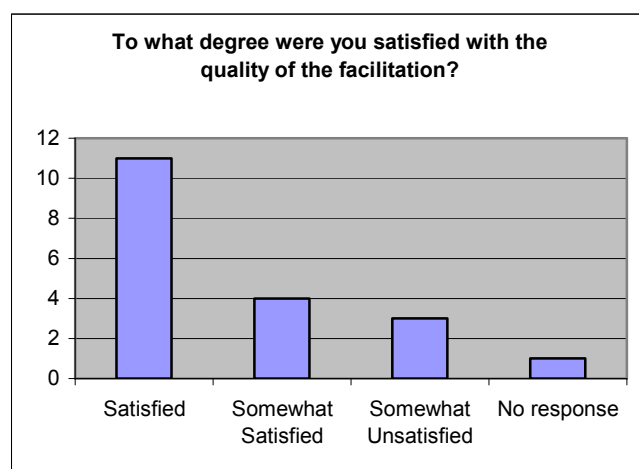
- **SUMMARY: Stakeholder Perceptions on Institutional Effects.** A relatively small percentage of stakeholders expressed the belief that the HCCU Consensus Building

Process would have long-term effects on the way they do their work. Interestingly, however, almost all expressed views that acknowledge that how they approached the HCCU-CBG was outside of the norm. Additionally, stakeholders were all able to cite specific instances where the HCCU Process enhanced their effectiveness, particularly as it relates to identifying and galvanizing support for shared objectives among diverse parties.

Findings Part B: Facilitation and Management of the HCCU Process

These findings are a mix of analysis of data from the surveys and interviews of the stakeholders and the self-evaluation by the Facilitation Team during their reflection session. The analysis of data from stakeholders is presented first.

Stakeholder Perceptions on Quality of the Facilitation and Management



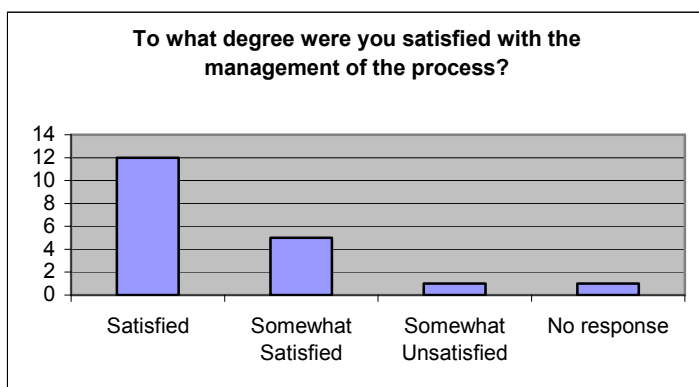
Seventy-nine percent of stakeholders surveyed rated themselves satisfied (58%) or somewhat satisfied (21%) with the quality of the facilitation of the HCCU Process.

Comparatively few (21%) were either unsatisfied (5%) or somewhat unsatisfied (16%). Eighty-three percent of respondents felt that the facilitation team was equally receptive (68.4%) or somewhat equally

receptive (15.8%) to all perspectives. Only 5.3%, or one respondent, felt that the facilitators were not at all equally receptive to the different perspectives; likewise (5.3%) of respondents felt that the facilitators were somewhat unequally receptive to perspectives of different stakeholders. When asked in the interviews to identify positive and negatives about the facilitation style, respondents generally recognized the “daunting task” faced by the facilitation team trying to balance the need to move the process forward against the desire to ensure that all participants felt

– and were in fact – heard. Some of the positives used to describe the facilitation were “patient and methodical”, “disciplined, structured”, “didn’t get ahead of the group” and “appropriately assertive.” On the negative side, two interviewees felt that the facilitators allowed the Process to drag on too long, and that they entertained both plenary session and *ex parte* objections from some groups, even after some of those objections had been previously dealt with. One interviewee spoke of feeling “pushed to concede” on certain issues and another mentioned feeling “push back” after making it clear that the discussion was moving into an area that the group was not necessarily comfortable with. Others felt that the FT suffered from a lack of in-depth expertise in the subject matter which had two main effects: 1) it led them to encourage the group toward a fruitless pursuit of agreement on the longer single text document for more time than warranted; and 2) it made them unable to anticipate “key points of division” and thus, reduce the length of the overall Process.

One interviewee felt that toward the end of the Process, the facilitators became too invested in delivering a certain outcome, that outcome being the detailed single text agreement, and that “if [they] knew health care” they would have known that they were leading the CBG into “a level of such specificity that organizations could not sign on.” Further thoughts on the issue of the facilitation and its effects on the outcome were that although it took some time getting there, the FT “did a good job getting [the final agreement] into a readable, digestible form.” Another perspective was that one of the most impressive aspects of the facilitation during this period was that the team “didn’t get rattled” by the decision to abandon the single text agreement and pursue something less detailed.



Although not asked directly about this aspect of the management of the process, at least two stakeholders expressed confusion about the roles of the various FT members, and volunteered that the Process was

“overstaffed.” Another point mentioned was confusion about the role of the facilitators as managers. It was perceived at some points that the facilitation and management team seemed unwilling to relinquish control over information related to use of resources, and general oversight of the process. Participants who made financial contributions believed that this created a “consultancy” relationship with the facilitation and management team, and felt at times as though “the process was hijacked by the consultants as opposed to owned by the members.” In general however, even those who felt a lack of clarity about the role of the SFCG and Meridian were generally pleased with the result (“we got our money’s worth and more . . . and at the end of the day I’m a satisfied customer.”)

Facilitation Team Self-Evaluation

The Facilitation Team reflection session in general tracked the same subject areas covered by the stakeholder survey and interviews. The FT was asked a series of questions and encouraged to engage in a candid discussion about how the HCCU Process unfolded and their own performance. Among the many areas of discussion were: nature and size of the CBG, facilitation, funding, and general lessons learned from the Process. For purposes of this section, only facilitation and funding will be discussed.

- i) **Facilitation** – the FT’s own observations about their performance during the HCCU Process were consistent with those of the stakeholders, but as expected, displayed a greater depth of understanding about why certain approaches were taken. With regard to the length of the process, the FT generally felt that it was unavoidable, especially given the outcome of the Presidential elections, which changed the posture of some members of the group and hence changed the entire dynamic of the consensus building process.

While many stakeholders felt that the single text negotiating process was drawn out and superfluous, all members of the FT agreed that it was necessary, whether

or not the single text document itself would eventually become the final agreement, as it served to clarify differences among the participants and lay the foundation for the ultimate agreement. Having the benefit of understanding the distinction between the facilitation team and the subject matter experts, the FT expressed the view that the lengthy single text negotiation process was not a failure of understanding on their part of the issues, but rather, a result of their having not adequately resisted efforts by some of the SMEs to control the content of the single text document, and hence, the outcome of the consensus building. In retrospect, the FT believed that they should have more strongly clarified for the SMEs that their role was not to advocate for a specific type of agreement, but to provide information and expertise to inform the stakeholders in reaching their own agreement. Most members of the FT accurately predicted the response some stakeholders had to the facilitation style, and were untroubled by – and did not share – the view that some participants received favored treatment. They did however understand how that perception might have developed as a throwback from the time when there was an AG. Regarding the agreement eventually reached by the group, the FT unanimously agreed that the final output was an accurate reflection of where the true consensus lay.

- ii) **Management and Funding** – All members of the FT agreed that the Process may have appeared – and in fact may have been – overstuffed. This was attributed to the fact that early process design anticipated more frequent use of subcommittees and task forces to deliberate on sub-issues. When this did not materialize as soon as was expected, or in the manner expected, the FT decided to remain intact as a unit and divide the work to use each member to their highest skills. In retrospect, most of FT members believe this approach may have contributed to some doubt and curiosity on the part of stakeholders about whether resources were being effectively managed. The Meridian Institute partners felt that the project could

have benefited from more financial transparency and efficiency on the part of SFCG, but understood that the lack thereof was likely a result of technical and organizational issues more than an unwillingness to share information.

Regarding funding levels, the FT agreed that the project was so dynamic that all the funding needs could not have been anticipated at the outset. The incremental approach to fundraising was necessary given the uncertainty of the continuation of the project at several points, but it did contribute to the appearance of a lack of transparency as between the FT and the CBG, and between SFCG and its partners at Meridian. One clear regret was that the compensation of the SMEs, though arranged by SFCG and a member of the AG, went directly to them rather than through SFCG as financial managers of the project. This was seen as contributing to the FT's lack of leverage to direct their work, and in turn contributing to the protracted single text negotiation process. Another observation was that the FT should have pushed harder to eliminate the "middle man effect" that resulted when some stakeholders were allowed to act as broker for foundation funding. Finally, the FT raised the issue (but did not answer it) of whether a greater diversity of funding sources might have impacted the direction and outcome of the HCCU Process.

- **SUMMARY: Stakeholder Perceptions on Facilitation and Management.** Stakeholders generally appreciated both the facilitation and management of the HCCU Process. Most displayed an awareness of the delicate balancing act that was necessary to ensure that the process moved forward, without individual participants feeling as though they were not heard, or that their concerns had not been addressed. Nevertheless, some participants, though very few did feel that the concerns were not addressed, and that the FT displayed unequal receptiveness to different perspectives, depending on whose perspectives they were. Stakeholders felt that the management of the HCCU Process could have been done

with more communication from the FT, as well as greater clarification of roles and responsibilities among the various staff, as well as between the staff and the CBG.

- **SUMMARY: Facilitation Team Self-Evaluation of Facilitation and Management.** The FT's self evaluation and reflection session demonstrated full awareness of how they were perceived by the CBG in general, as well as by unsatisfied CBG members in particular, in all aspects of the facilitation. They acknowledge that there may have been missteps at some points but deny that this was due to a lack of expertise in the subject matter. The FT saw the mistakes as being mainly related to the use of the SMEs and a lack of clarity of their role in supporting the CBG. Where management of the process is concerned, the FT believed that most decisions were supported by the changing circumstances of the Process, though not always adequately communicated to the CBG and former members of the AG. Even acknowledging the technical and other difficulties faced by the organization during the project, the FT generally agreed that at times, SFCG could have been more transparent about the budget and funding situation.

Findings Part C: General Perceptions and Lessons Learned

One of the goals of SFCG-USA in commissioning this evaluation was to look at certain aspects of the HCCU Process not from the standpoint of "pure" consensus building theory, but to determine whether, at the end of the day, the participants felt that the exercise produced not only concrete outcomes, but collateral benefits (e.g., new relationships and understanding) and possibilities for the future. Although many of the evaluation questions were designed to surface information to determine whether the HCCU Process employed best practices of consensus building, there were also opportunities for stakeholders to share their general impressions of the HCCU Process, sometimes without reference to any specific element (facilitation, management, etc.), and give their opinions on likely future impacts, and considerations for the future. This is purely qualitative data, and since not all stakeholders gave their impressions, the opinions outlined below should not be interpreted as having been shared by many (or few) of the stakeholder

group. Rather, they represent a scan of general perceptions shared with the evaluation team. Those perceptions are grouped according to theme and reproduced below verbatim.

Stakeholder General Perceptions

On the sense of moral purpose:

“The dialogue around those principles was more important than laying down a contract.”

“[Ultimately] it is immoral not to have coverage [for the uninsured]. Whatever would advance that agenda – that was why we were there.”

“HCCU had the component of discussion but had the goal of [actually] solving the problem . . . There was a moral pressure on everyone to reach that goal.”

“The concept – by definition the name – Search for Common Ground. It was a very principled activity. The desirability of consensus and the effort to endure getting there. The idea of it has a certain self-fulfilling prophecy.”

On the willingness to compromise:

“Everyone had to find their second best solution because you weren’t going to get your first. This was a key part of it. The intended purpose was to reach consensus. This was different and wonderful.”

“We purposefully tried to find virtue in choosing a second choice.”

“How we left was going to be really critical if we had to leave. Understand that if I left, we would be sad not to be part of a supportive process. If [certain issues] were in there, I would leave, but I would leave politely.”

On the possible future impact of the HCCU Process:

“As we push forward for universal coverage, we will be pushing for bringing everyone to the table, and people who come with goodwill and not for railroading. If they do railroad they will be excluded. The process may not be as quick as getting people together at the Capitol Grill [but] if you want this nation to buy into it you need to have [diverse] major players at the table.”

“In virtually every other engagement that was designed to talk about how a policy should move forward, groups got stuck on ideas and proposals and didn’t really engage in a constructive process designed to achieve compromise and consensus. This was very different in this respect.”

“It really required us to put aside some day to day things in order to engage in the process in an effective manner. I felt the stakes were high enough . . . and the outcomes have been positive.”

“I really do believe this was a unique process. I’ve worked in Washington for 30 years and the dynamic in this was qualitatively different than in other discussions on health care. The conception of the approach, the way it was carried out, the people at the table, the way it was explained to them, and the way they approached the project. I was grateful for it and thought it was a good use of my time. It will be lasting in its impact. It wouldn’t be a bad idea to do this evaluation in a few years to see how this process has affected where [we] are now.”

- **SUMMARY: Stakeholders’ General Perceptions.** Almost all stakeholders, when given the opportunity to discuss general impressions of the HCCU Process spoke in positive terms of three things: 1) the sense of moral purpose in the HCCU Process that does not always exist in other Washington DC policy discussions; 2) the apparently unprecedented willingness by most groups to compromise for the benefit of the whole; and 3) the potential of the Process to impact future policymaking efforts inside the Beltway.

CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

This **Conclusions and Recommendations** section draws from the data to reach a determination about how well various aspects of the HCCU Process were conducted. Although adherence to certain criteria is not the only measure of success for a consensus building project, it is a useful place to begin. Each of the criterion laid out in the **Evaluation Criteria** section are discussed below. Following those conclusions are recommendations that generally track the format of the **Findings** section.

Conclusions on Process Criteria

- i) **Representative of all relevant and different interests** – before launching the HCCU Process, the SFCG-USA/Meridian Institute team performed a thorough assessment that involved researching and interviewing experts and stakeholders in the field of health care. Following that assessment, they consulted with an Advisory Group to determine what the relevant and different interests were, and what level of representation those interests should have in the HCCU Process. Even following their work with the AG, the SFCG/Meridian team continued to research options about which sectors and which specific individuals should be represented in the process. Although some stakeholders and the FT acknowledged that there might have been *more* stakeholders, all parties accepted that the result was a broadly diverse group of stakeholders that was representative of all relevant and different interests. 63.2% felt that the Group was sufficiently inclusive.

- ii) **Driven by a practical purpose shared by the group** – the purpose of the HCCU Consensus Process was to find consensus on recommendations that would expand health coverage to as many people as possible, as quickly as

possible. Most members of the CBG believed that goal of developing such recommendations to be practical and achievable, and this purpose was endorsed by the Group. 90% of the respondents felt some degree of satisfaction about their input on the objectives of the CBG and the Process.

- iii) **Adapts to and incorporates high-quality information** – the HCCU-FT enlisted the support of SMEs and technical experts to determine the practical validity of the proposals generated by the Group. This information was used to determine both the scope of the possible consensus and the form that the agreement of the parties should take. Although there were some initial difficulties and missteps determining how to incorporate information provided by the SMEs, the FT quickly took corrective action to reach a conclusion that the stakeholders generally accepted as appropriate.

- iv) **Encourages participants to challenge assumptions** – one of the most oft-repeated values of the HCCU Process mentioned by the stakeholders was the tendency of the FT to push participants to challenge their own long-held views, and “think outside the box” to fashion solutions. Although stakeholders acknowledge that they did not always alter their points of view, an overwhelming majority endorsed the process as having been useful.

- v) **Keeps participants at the table, interested and learning** – throughout the interviews, and in the survey responses, many stakeholders expressed frustration at the length of the Process. Interestingly however, none of the stakeholders who left did so for that reason, and those who remained were in fact congratulatory of the efforts of the FT in making it worth their while to remain at the table, by providing not just high-quality information, but the

opportunity to interact with other stakeholders in a manner that they had not experienced before.

- vi) **Seeks consensus only after discussion and exploration of the different interests** – the stakeholders and FT both believed that there was thorough discussion and exploration of the different interests. In fact, the single text negotiation was viewed by some as an overly exhaustive exploration. There were some stakeholders – though relatively few – at the table that felt that discussion and exploration was given short shrift in favor of arriving at consensus.

As mentioned in the **Evaluation Criteria** section, one overarching goal of consensus building is to **“help organizations and communities adapt constructively and creatively to issues they face and the larger context in which they operate.”** Stakeholders reported that their participation in the initiative was unlike that in other similar processes, and yielded benefits that they could act upon immediately, such as new partnerships and relationships that will increase their effectiveness in the health care policy arena.

Conclusions on Outcomes Criteria

- i) **Produced a high-quality agreement** – the agreement reached by the HCCU-CBG was supported by 64% of respondents, with 88.2% indicating that they felt it was to some degree politically realistic. Although there was some lingering impatience about the process to arrive at it, a majority of stakeholders interviewed felt that it was a full and accurate representation of the group’s agreement. An indication of the quality of the agreement might be found in the fact that it has already been used as the basis of at least two legislative initiatives by a coalition of CBG members on Capitol Hill to date.

- ii) **Ended stalemate** – almost all stakeholders reported the development of new networks and contacts, or the improvement of old ones. Among the stakeholders that remained at the table, it can certainly be said that stalemate on the issues that were the subject of the agreement – if it previously existed – was ended. What is unclear is whether those stakeholders who left the Process would consider the HCCU Process to have advanced the broader national discourse on health care.

- iii) **Compared favorably with other planning or decision-making methods** – most stakeholders – many with decades long experience in policymaking – felt that the HCCU Process was unique and compared favorably with other methods. Some expressed the intention to utilize consensus building to advance other initiatives and projects in future, and others were impressed by the level of commitment displayed, and the maintenance of confidentiality by all parties who participated.

- iv) **Produced feasible proposals and creative ideas for action** – on the issue of feasibility, most stakeholders were favorable. 53% felt that the proposals generated by the group were creative or somewhat creative.

- v) **Created new working relationships and political capital** – almost unanimously, the stakeholders in the HCCU Process agreed that this was the case, and that the process and outcomes both produced new working relationships and political capital. Groups that previously kept each other at arms length are now working in partnership to promote legislation, and others who were previously unknown to each other report sharing information.

- vi) **Produced new information and analyses accepted by stakeholders** – the HCCU-CBG was unable to reach agreement on the detailed recommendations in the single text negotiating document. Most believed this was the case precisely because they could not agree on the analysis of the data presented by the SMEs and in rare cases, did not agree on the validity of the data itself. Some stakeholders agreed that the new information produced by the Process might be useful in future but acknowledged that they are not yet in a position to make that decision.

- vii) **Produced outcomes regarded as serving the common good or public interest** – the stakeholders generally regarded the outcomes (not limited to the agreement itself) as serving the common good or public interest and a few spoke of their participation not in terms of policy outcomes and objectives, but in terms of a moral imperative based on their desire to see the common good served. There is ample data to support the view that the policy and relationship outcomes of the process are likely to lead to additional (besides those already underway) initiatives by participants that could gain broader support including that of coalitions built during the HCCU Process.

Recommendations Part A: The HCCU Consensus Building Process

Design and Process

The following are recommendations for Search for Common Ground – USA to consider in the development of future consensus building processes.

- 1) **Fully discuss how criteria for membership is developed and share with participants the values, competing interests and constraints involved in constituting the consensus building group.** Stakeholders in the HCCU Process who expressed some

degree of dissatisfaction with the membership seemed to have an incomplete understanding of the criteria and considerations that led to the choices made by the FT and AG. The comments appeared to reflect a mistaken belief that in constituting membership, the FT should have sought absolute equality in numbers from each sector or interest and as many stakeholders as possible.

- 2) **Be attentive to domination of discussions by certain interests or participants and take ameliorative measures to ensure that group dynamics do not determine outcome.** Some stakeholders in the HCCU Process expressed the view that the FT gave preferential treatment to some participants, and did not commit sufficient time and resources to keeping others in the process since doing so might have compromised the group's ability to reach consensus. To avoid the appearance that some stakeholders are being treated more favourably than others, facilitators should seek out opportunities and develop mechanisms for the interests of less vocal participants to be heard and given due consideration.

- 3) **Emphasize the responsibility of all stakeholders to participate fully in the process, including being adequately prepared for meetings and maintaining continuity of attendance.** Among the stakeholders who were dissatisfied with their input and that of others, one reason cited was the poor participation of some CBG members who raised issues that had already been discussed. Some participants who perceived what they believed was bias on the part of the FT cited examples of discussions that occurred outside plenary sessions with participants who did not attend plenary sessions or were not adequately prepared when they did.

Policy, Relationship and Institutional Effects

- 4) **Set and follow ground rules that clarify subcommittee and task force powers and responsibilities.** The latter stages of the HCCU Process involved several smaller group conference calls and meetings as well as separate communications with the FT by members of the CBG. This was interpreted by a small number of stakeholders as a parallel negotiation process to which they were not privy. To avoid this misconception in future, ground rules for sub-groups should always be ratified by the full group.

- 5) **Pay close attention to cues of the consensus building group during negotiations to ensure that they understand and continue to support techniques utilised to produce a positive outcome.** Most stakeholders in the HCCU Process who were interviewed expressed ambivalence, or outright impatience about the persistence, length and usefulness of the single text negotiation, and some stakeholders did not appear to fully comprehend the purpose of the exercise.

- 6) **Consider offering stakeholders a primer or mini-training in consensus building to provide a framework for the process that are about to participate in.** Most stakeholders expressed satisfaction with the outcome of the HCCU Process and acknowledged that they had made contacts and developed relationships that would continue and that would help them in their work. Paradoxically, most also expressed doubt that it would change the way they worked over the long term, perhaps because even after participating in such a process, they did not understand the nuances that distinguish consensus building from traditional policy negotiations.

Recommendations Part B: Facilitation and Management of the HCCU Process

- 7) **Clarify roles and responsibilities among facilitation team members and between FT and SMEs at the process design stage of the project.** Stakeholders and facilitation

team members alike felt that the HCCU Process was overstaffed and that there was insufficient delineation of roles between FT members. The facilitation team also felt that there could and should have been a more thorough discussion with the subject matter experts about the scope of their responsibilities.

- 8) **Manage budget and financial issues like process issues – making long range and contingency plans, establishing boundaries and clarifying roles of all members of the management team.** In the HCCU Process, SFCG-USA and the Meridian Institute shared management responsibilities for the project, with SFCG-USA assuming primary responsibility for budgets and finance, and Meridian managing staff assignments. Although Meridian was a consultant hired by SFCG-USA, the relationship operated more as a partnership. In addition, former AG members assumed a quasi-management role at various points during the process, and viewed themselves as separate from other stakeholders in this regard. There did not appear to be an effort to explicitly address these ambiguities.

- 9) **Distinguish between funding and management, and act with a greater degree of transparency on budget and finances when stakeholders are also donors to the project.** Stakeholders who contributed to the HCCU Process commented on the relative lack of information they received from SFCG-USA about the budget and how resources were being used. Some expressed the view that their financial contributions entitled them to participation in management decisions.

Recommendations Part C: General Perceptions and Lessons Learned

- 10) **Build on relationships and partnerships formed to extend buy in for policy consensus processes beyond the direct participants in the HCCU Process.**
Participants in the HCCU Process have proven the best spokespersons for the value and potential of consensus building. SFCG –USA should play a more visible role to

increase awareness about this tool and promote its application to other policy disputes.