

Neighbor to Neighbor (N2N) Annual Convening Summary

December 9, 2015

“The room looked and felt like what the real world looks like today”
-N2N Grantee

Seattle Foundation’s Neighbor to Neighbor (N2N) program aims to build the power, influence and resources of those most impacted by racial and economic disparities. N2N strategies include listening to and learning from community, investing in community based organizations, connecting community groups to each other and to funders, and advocating for community priorities. In response to grantee requests to strengthen ties to

each other and to funders, N2N held a grantee-funder learning convening at the New Holly Gathering Hall in South Seattle. N2N advisory members, staff and grantees came together to celebrate the work of grantee organizations and learn from their experiences.

Thank you to all of the grantees and funders who participated in this event. The turnout for the early evening event was impressive, despite the rainy, cold December weather. Forty-seven N2N grantees, six N2N advisory committee members, eight funding partners and twelve staff and consultants from Seattle Foundation convened, creating a diverse mixture of age, gender and ethnicity. The convening offered an opportunity for all to learn more about community priorities and deepen relationships.

Opening messages given by N2N grantees, advisory members and Seattle Foundation leadership set the stage for the meeting, underscoring the significant role of equity and empowering communities in the work of N2N grantees. These topics were also prominent in the later small group discussions.

Before and after the presentations and discussions, participants networked while snacking on food and desserts. After the opening, participants joined one of six “table talk” discussions focused on one of three N2N result areas: (1) Increased Capacity: Engaging and mobilizing community members, (2) Increased Connections: Building stronger relationships and networks within and/or among communities and (3) Increased Influence: Achieving greater community influence on practices, programs, neighborhood initiatives and policy change for social/economic equity. Grantees shared how their organizations were achieving the desired results. Assigned facilitators and note takers at each table guided the discussions and captured each participant’s comments. It became clear during the meeting and also through post meeting evaluations, completed by eighteen attendees that the time allowed for such discussions was valuable but only enough to “start conversations.”



N2N staff and advisory committee members have committed to build on the momentum from the convening and continue to strengthen relationships with grantee organizations.

WHAT DID WE LEARN?

The points made by attendees at different tables provided insight into the effective strategies, challenges and issues that grantees are encountering as well as their priorities for funder involvement. Their comments,

passion and work centered on a wide number of issues, including migrant justice, engaging Native Americans, LGBTQ and youth engagement, police violence, job training, civic engagement, immigrant rights, farmworker rights, academic performance and much more. The most frequent examples of effective strategies, challenges and areas where funder help is needed for each of the three table discussion areas are presented below.

1) INCREASED CAPACITY: COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT & MOBILIZATION

EFFECTIVE STRATEGIES

- Provide culturally relevant, authentic engagement strategies, which include interpretation in the home language of community members and preparation of materials which are meaningful to community members;
- Utilize art as a way to engage a broader community and food preparation as a way to connect more people in mobilization activities;
- Engage and develop youth in mobilization activities as this expands outreach and paves the way for tomorrow's leaders;
- Be intentional about reaching out to community members who have previously not been engaged, recognizing that this work will take additional time and resources;
- Identify action steps rather than strategies to guide community work; and
- Partner small organizations with large institutional partners to increase the level of engagement and services.



CHALLENGES

- Grantees rely on volunteers, making it difficult to ensure consistent services;
- The cost to train new volunteers and engage staff who understand and have deep ties to the community is high;
- There is a lack of resources for agencies to simultaneously sustain and grow community mobilization work;
- There is a need to develop alternate strategies to reach people who may have multiple jobs, be homebound or unable to participate in person for other reasons; and
- Funders put unrealistic outcome expectations on community organizations.

WHERE FUNDER HELP IS NEEDED

- Focus on building long term relationships with grantees including working more deeply as partners;
- Invest in technical assistance for grantees, recognizing that this support fills critical gaps in grantee staffing and builds the infrastructure and capacity of organizations; and
- Consider investing in larger grants that extend for longer periods of time and include funds for communication strategies that increase funder and community member awareness about the benefits of the work underway.

2) INCREASED CONNECTIONS: NETWORKS AND RELATIONSHIP BUILDING

EFFECTIVE STRATEGIES

- Work with other groups and coalitions that address issues that are mutually important – even if they aren't the primary issue of the grantee – benefiting both groups because their outreach potential, perspectives and priorities are advanced;
- Connect smaller organizations to larger organizations, making it more likely to be included in the grant applications and reports generated by larger organizations; and
- Stay connected to groups focused on diversity as they are well-positioned to make connections across groups, market and support sustainability of worthy efforts.



CHALLENGES

- Real relationships take time to build; short-term grants are not sufficient;
- Communication materials are expensive to prepare and share;
- Communication strategies of larger organizations are often not geared to youth or to persons from different ethnic, language or cultural groups; and
- There is not enough time or grant resources to create opportunities for people to work side-by-side in partnership.

WHERE FUNDER HELP IS NEEDED

- Invest in longer term efforts that provide partners with opportunities to develop and cultivate relationships, and jointly develop action plans to build on their common interests and thirst for the work;
- Greater investments are needed in interpretation (written materials, staffing) and technology access to increase engagement and communication within and across networks and partnerships and to under-represented populations.

3) INCREASED INFLUENCE: PRACTICE, PROGRAM, NEIGHBORHOOD AND POLICY CHANGE FOR SOCIAL AND ECONOMIC EQUITY

EFFECTIVE STRATEGIES

- Promote strategies where people can tell their own story; in their own words;
- Focus on issues that are most relevant in the daily life of people;
- Look for, celebrate and build on small but significant wins: one family, one block at a time;
- Promote intergenerational engagement and build out to include multi-communities of color;
- Ground, drive and grow change efforts in the values, culture and beliefs of communities; and

- Reduce fear, isolation and shame for communities experiencing different issues.

CHALLENGES

- There is a need to include people from different language groups in all efforts and to provide translated materials;
- Making communication strategies authentic and useful for all people is important; including creating more venues for their voice in the media;
- Creating a unified voice, without silencing the voices of some is challenging, but essential to do;
- It is important to break the silence and fear for new immigrants and make systems, such as 911 and school counselors, work for all persons who are non-English speakers; and
- For some populations politics has a negative connotation, making organizing difficult.

WHERE FUNDER HELP IS NEEDED

- Stay aware of and fund efforts which increase the visibility of issues which are inspiring people to come together as a community; and
- Prioritize investments in work which promotes cross cultural, cross demographic connections where people are working together.

GRANTEE RECOMMENDATIONS

Attendees shared their ideas for future events. All will be used to improve upcoming convenings. Some examples are presented below:

- Schedule a longer event to give people a chance to network, build relationships and share more information about our work;
- Set clear achievable goals for the convening;
- Provide more inclusive planning time to allow grantees to select table topics and funders more time to become familiar with the work of grantees;
- Allow more time for funders to talk and for grantees to ask funders questions;
- Give grantees an opportunity to share one new idea/vision/program/service they want to build out;
- Share contact lists of people who attended the event;
- Provide a calendar for more events where N2N organizations can tell funders what they have done;
- Create a think tank board or gallery where participants can add their collective responses and offer collective solutions;
- Invite all groups to bring a "show and tell" board about their organization; and
- Offer a convening in South King County, near Kent.

Thank you again for sharing your thoughts and ideas. N2N will use this information to plan our 2016 Fall N2N Annual Convening.

ADDENDUM

- Neighbor to Neighbor 2015 Convening Directory of Organizations
- Neighbor to Neighbor Advisory Committee and Staff