
CONSCIOUS EVOLUTION CONSULTING

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Annual Convening Report
Neighbor to Neighbor
Seattle Foundation

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NEIGHBOR TO NEIGHBOR (N2N)'s ANNUAL CONVENING REPORT

May 30, 2018

Overview:

The 2018 Neighbor to Neighbor (N2N) Annual Convening was held at Bethaday Community Learning Center in White Center on May 30th and brought together approximately 100 people in total, representing 40 N2N grantees, as well as a variety of N2N Advisory Committee members, funding partners, and Seattle Foundation representatives. Throughout the gathering, N2N grantees shared their experiences, networked, and learned from others in their communities. Other participants, including N2N Advisory Committee members, other funders, and partners participated with the intent of learning from the participating N2N grantees. The purpose of the event was to share knowledge and perspectives in order to advance racial and economic equity in the region. The convening began with neighborhood meet ups for Kent, South Seattle, and White Center, followed by a panel discussion entitled “Reflections on Power Building and Multiracial Coalitions,” small group discussions, and open networking time. The guiding theme of the event “Building our Multiracial Movement Together” continued conversations that began during previous N2N grantee convenings, and influenced the content of the panel discussion and small group Table Talks following the panel.

Documentation Design:

Conscious Evolution Consulting (CEC) attended the May 30, 2018 session to provide documentation of the proceedings. CEC team members Andy Coate, MSW, Ann Luetzow, MSW, and Justine Cruise-Roberson, MSW, took notes, focusing on documenting the content of conversations, significant quotes from participants, and salient nuances of engagement (i.e. interactions that seem critical or significant to the purpose and objectives of the project). Additionally, each table had a notetaker who documented the conversations at each of the 15 tables. Notetakers submitted their notes to CEC, and these notes were included as data in the analysis.

Data Analysis Method:

The CEC team members and individual table notetakers’ notes comprised the qualitative “data” to be analyzed by the CEC team. The CEC team members analyzed the data by identifying repeated themes and content. These themes were reviewed and compared to identify associations among them, then were organized into issue categories.

Summary of Data Analysis:

Conversations stemming from the theme “Building our Multiracial Movement Together” spoke to the importance of collaboration and action. This general focus on action culminated in a final question prompting participants, including funders, grantees, Seattle Foundation staff, and other community members, to reflect on what they would do or take with them from the event. In this spirit of action, a greater question guided the analysis process and formation of recommendations: How can Seattle Foundation best leverage the input acquired through these N2N grantee convenings to foster meaningful and lasting change to support the N2N community?

Three primary themes were identified and expanded upon throughout the report: Building Connections, Focusing on Strategy, and Implementing Change. Each major theme is broken down into sub-themes.

Building Connections

“Purposefully be inclusive and anti-racist beyond the appearance of equality; go past the surface level and making sure the reality is equitable.” - N2N participant

Collaboration

“Be specific without being exclusive. Build intention and cross collaboration.” – N2N Participant

Identifying collaborative opportunities and building relationships intentionally was a very commonly discussed topic. Intentionality was described by participants as a conduit for learning how to show up for each other and expand how communities continue to think about connections with other allies. Committing to intentional approaches to building community and sharing knowledge, as one participant stated “needs to be meaningful collaboration and not collaboration for the sake of collaborating... It takes time to learn more deeply how goals are aligned and how relationships can be created.”

- One participant commented, “It is import to reach out to other cultures and extend beyond our comfort zones to build cross collaborations as we pass the baton to the next generation.”
- Another participant pointed out the importance of communities building new systems after dismantling them, with a focus on inclusivity and supporting cross-cultural connections within the community.
- Creating space for honoring trauma and healing was noted by participants as a critical component of building connections. Politics were cited as a barrier to collaboration with organizations that have a different relationship with trauma and healing processes. Internalized oppression was further cited as a barrier relating to the lack of adequate space held for the recognition of its impact.
 - One participant stated, “There is internalized racism and trauma which can cause rifts in collaborative spaces. We have to recognize the trauma and as a result collaboration is not easy.”

Participant Takeaways/Action Steps

“Ask ‘what is missing?’ instead. We need to build relationships, which takes time.”

Many participants stated they plan to continue to be open to more collaborations. For example, the White Center group is excited to learn more about new providers and learn how they can mutually support each other.

Consultant Recommendations for Collaboration:

How can Seattle Foundation continue to support N2N community members in coming together intentionally?

- Identify ways to best support the N2N community in leveraging knowledge and expertise to build collective power through collaboration.

Collective Power

*“Power changes a lot over time. We create new ways of existing when we build power.”
- N2N participant*

As connections are built, a major tool identified by participants was recognizing the collective power of those in the N2N community to leverage community knowledge. Attendees echoed the sentiment that

“there’s a lot of power in coming together to find ways to work together.” Building alliances to break down barriers is key to building power. Further, participants discussed the need for the work to extend beyond Communities of Color, including involvement of white allies.

- Participants spoke to the necessity of building collective power in the current political climate that is threatening so many communities, especially Communities of Color, immigrants, and/or refugees.
- Another participant stated that building connections can harness energy and passion for creating change, which can lead to building collective power.

Participant Takeaways/Action Steps

“Empathizing with others is key. If you don’t empathize, you can’t help others. It’s impossible to fully understand another person or community’s situation, but open your heart. We have far more similarities than we have differences.”

“All of our work is interconnected. We’ve had generations over generations experience struggles and yet there is this constant renewal of hope with each new group. Let’s continue to find ways to work in partnership. We’re not alone in this fight!”

Consultant Recommendations for Collective Power:

How can Seattle Foundation continue to support N2N community members as they cultivate collective power?

- Conduct an in-depth review with N2N community on current approaches – are they working to achieve community goals? Are strategies currently being used considered intentional and impactful by community? How could N2N best support efforts to come together intentionally?

Fostering Trust

“How do you work in communities and build the trust? There is a disconnect between funders who seem to be mostly white and our Communities of Color.” - N2N participant

Participants noted that intentionality and transparency in the process of building trust can cultivate healthier, longer lasting relationships between funders and grantees. Fostering trust comes with listening, keeping an open mind to innovative approaches, and personal reflection on the privilege and power funders hold.

- Organizations change over time and consequently, so do their needs. One participant asked the question, “How do you build relations with other organizations, building relationships and trust? It takes a lot of time – years. This process must be natural, it cannot be forced.”
- “Advocate for one another; build relationships on trust.”
- Another participant stated the barrier they most commonly experience is a disconnect between predominantly white funders in Communities of Color. They wonder how to find commonalities to build the necessary trust.
- A commonly explored theme was the need for collaborative action, and the need to come together to inspire trust and collaboration.

Participant Takeaways/Action Steps

“Recommit to people I want to reach out to, people interested in organization, and be present to build relationships.”

“Acknowledging that organizations grow and change and how that affects relationships.”

“Remind myself it’s okay to be in awkward situations.”

Consultant Recommendations for Fostering Trust:

As a bridge between N2N grantees and the world of funders, how can Seattle Foundation promote transparency, accountability, and trust between community members and funders?

- Partner with community groups to promote more diverse representation in funding circles.

Focusing on Strategy

Invest in Leaders

Cultivate Leaders and Connect

"Community needs its internal power to be acknowledged." -N2N participant

Community needs its power to be recognized and work being done on this front is elevating opportunities to organically raise leaders from within communities. Through connection and collaboration, participants said they are able to better provide resources, support, and leadership development to their communities.

- One such example was the creation of the African Coalition of Community Leaders by N2N grantees, bringing together approximately 80 community leaders. This strategy results in stronger networks, access to more groups, and opportunities to share resources.
- "My job is to push the local individuals to speak up. I am not speaking for them but rather encourage them and build them up to speak for themselves. We show them the power of themselves and community."

Youth Empowerment

"There is nothing more 'upstream' than youth. They are the future and should be at the core of the solutions." - N2N participant

Early involvement of youth was frequently identified as a key strategy to empower youth who are or one day will be community leaders. This was most commonly suggested in the form of equipping youth with necessary tools and giving youth space to serve as leaders. Participants' strategies for this ranged from having young people on nonprofit boards, listening and engaging in meaningful conversation about what the path to leadership could look like, to developing multigenerational opportunities for youth to learn and be empowered by those who served before them.

- "Invest in kids at early age. With power comes responsibility. Show youth the right thing, they can be responsible."
- Other comments on early involvement of youth revealed how young people are, in fact, a source of hope for the future. They are visionary and see the world from a different perspective. "This inclusion has contributed to visibly seeing youth's stance."
- One participant noted that the bureaucratic nature of many nonprofits is off-putting to young people who are investing in more radical approaches to change.

Participant Takeaways/Action Steps

"Bring a youth member onboard."

"When you get older, you get wiser, but you can also lose imagination. The world we want is created with radical imagination, probably by people younger than me. Make space for the young people to participate in change."

"We all have power. We have to activate and use it."

- “Raise youth voices, especially in developing leadership and job preparedness.”
- “Sometimes it seems like adults are more rigid in their thinking. Youth are creative and often don’t carry the baggage and hesitancy to try new things that older people might. Let youth participate! Fund their ideas!”

Consultant Recommendations for Investing in Leaders:

How can N2N support youth leadership development through existing N2N grantees, or projects led by youth. How can N2N collaborate with community organizations to support leadership development more broadly?

- Consult with organizations to devise community-driven strategies to support leadership development, especially among youth.
- Provide resources for current work being done to support community leaders.

Access to Education

“Encourage education because this is a form of resistance.” - N2N participant

Supporting Youth Education / Infiltrating Systems

Participants shared many stories of lack of access, discrimination, and dismissal of the value of their culture and identities in regards to interacting with educational systems. There is a dire need for action because youth are “slipping through the cracks” and “misconceptions of youth and their culture” are negatively impacting youth.

- One participant shared that their organization is “working with Puget Sound education system to dismantle the system and start with a system that is anti-racist.”
- Due to the deeply rooted inequities in the educational system in this country, “the work of change often happens only at a micro level (one member of community, one funder, one teacher, one administrator). It takes a lot of work and time to make a little progress with a system as rigid as public education.”
- Participants offered strategies that could lead to a more equitable system:
 - One attendee stated the need for “cultural and language liaisons working in schools to directly support immigrant families to engage with the schools.”
 - Another participant said, “The schools need to learn about our cultures, native languages and traditions. This will empower students instead of having misconceptions of others or their own culture.”
 - One organization is helping bridge the gap between schools and families by creating spaces for young girls to be with their peers after school without the responsibilities of caretaking (e.g. cleaning, cooking, caring for siblings, translating for family members) they may have at home. The grantee organization is working with schools to understand immigrant and refugee culture and with families to become more familiarized with the education system.

Creating Educational Pathways for Youth

“Knowledge is power. When you know more about the system and how it affects people, you can become more active to disrupt those systems and educate others.” –N2N participant

Strategies for educational pathways were discussed by participants impacted by the education system. Participants noted that they would like to see some of the following strategies implemented in schools:

- Youth involvement in curriculum development representing students from many races, countries of origin, backgrounds, socioeconomic statuses, and parental education levels.
- Having a capabilities approach, education empowerment program.
- Financial literacy.
- Healthy relationships and sexuality curriculum.
- Education on institutional racism and dismantling systems of oppression.

Access to education was a frequently commented upon strategy that can help lead to solutions communities are working towards.

- Higher education
 - “Youth are helping by going to college. Young people over the years have accessed grant funds, organized and moved on to bigger and better things. What’s missing – we need to listen to youth.”
 - “Many limitations exist for students who want to go to college. An opportunity exists to work with parents of high school students to create pathways for college. Potential barriers such as concerns about DACA make access even more difficult.
- Community education
 - Participants noted that accessibility and relevance of topics are significant factors in empowering communities. One grantee stated their group helps people learn how to do things like pay bills online. “We have to help people in our community do everything when they first arrive.”

Participant Takeaways/Action Steps

“If we are asking the right questions? How do we frame the questions? We are over-jargonizing; it is a call for community to share knowledge.”

“How to partner/collaborate with other orgs to expand/grow expertise, e.g. org that focuses on birth to middle school students, how to expand knowledge into high school students, etc. Opportunity to share resources.”

“Schools not having proper safety equipment for chemistry – no gloves, goggles – vs. other schools that have everything needed to learn – inequality is there. School funding is not split equally. How to fight that kind of racism/divide is daunting.”

Consultant Recommendations for Access to Education:

How can N2N best support the grantee community in supporting community learning initiatives and community members to achieve the levels of education they desire?

- Fund and promote educational programming and youth preparation for higher education.
- Advocate for initiatives within educational systems to support immigrant and refugee families.

Political Representation

"A community with power can determine their own way forward. Communities of Color are too often left out of the policy and decision-making process which shape many aspects of their lives. Elected officials have too much power and not enough checks and balances from community stakeholders." - N2N participant

Organizing is a key strategy participants spoke about to increase political representation. This included efforts targeting both short and long term goals in a "two-prong attack." Organizers in the N2N community highlighted the importance of challenging leaders and being actively involved in influencing change. Further, one participant described influencing legislation as a "way to make a major collective impact," and many were in agreement that legislation should be a primary strategic focus.

- "Policy change is paramount; the current political environment is a challenge."
- "We need to consider legislative priorities and find power in the collective body."
- Taking action in Olympia was an additional strategy community members identified. Participants said their communities need a voice or else they will be ignored, mentioning the following focus areas:
 - Housing programs and tenant rights.
 - Mass incarceration and the cycle of recidivism.
 - Community representation in political offices. (i.e. Kent is not well represented despite its population of 127,000)
- Political power, spiritual power, connection to culture, and connection to place were said to be at the core of strategizing to increase political representation.

Participant Takeaways/Action Steps

"Sometimes you accept things until you are taught to come together to make a difference."

"Ensure all communities are represented. I will be reaching out to people to make sure I have the right resources."

"Learn more about organizations I heard about tonight, mission statements, passing bills, reach out to more people."

Consultant Recommendations for Political Representation:

In allocating funding, how can N2N support organizations in devising a "two-prong attack" – short and long term goals (policy change)? This will require that organizations' and communities' immediate needs are met, and is therefore intricately linked to other themes and recommendations outlined in this report.

- Support organizations in meeting basic needs so they can focus on longer term solutions, as they define for themselves.
- Recognize the importance of communities advocating for themselves and promote initiatives among the grantee community to influence policy change at local, state, and federal levels.

Resource Allocation

"When you know more about the system and how it affects people, you can become more active to disrupt those systems and educate others." - N2N participant

Small nonprofits are well acquainted with the challenges of securing funding for programs, staff, and overhead. Convening participants offered several ideas on how said knowledge can be leveraged as they

are the true experts in navigating the ongoing tension between community needs and allocation of resources.

- Several participants spoke to embracing collaborative efforts to secure funding. Some participants questioned whether the responsibility of coming together to secure funding should be their responsibility or if the onus should fall upon funding sources to increase accessibility. One participant asked if the collaborative funding approach was the only option for keeping small organizations afloat.
- One participant noted the importance of not making one person or organization represent an entire community, commenting, "...one Black person can't speak for all Black people and funders can't expect all groups to work together." Additionally, this pressure experienced when funders expect groups that don't get along to work together was echoed by multiple participants.
- "Some of it comes down to scarcity of resources. If we used our resources more wisely, we can do more. Yes. But it's still not enough at the end of the day."
- Other participants held the position of preferring to utilize multi-organization projects and programming. "We need not to see each other as competition. There's an abundance of opportunity and resources for all." Additional participants reflected on how their organization might not have all the resources they need but in aligning with other organizations, collaboration is transformative.

Participant Takeaways/Action Steps

"Raise awareness about N2N program and get someone to apply for a grant."

"Commitment to finding a different way to help people get funds and stop making people compete. All collaborative ways."

"Small organizations' inability to grow due to grassroots (funding) orgs' budget restrictions. How are restrictions determined?"

Consultant Recommendations for Resource Allocation:

How can N2N challenge the status quo of scarcity of resources in funding critical work happening within grantee communities?

- Utilize creative approaches to funding/support distribution. What resources other than money can N2N offer the grantee community? What approaches could be explored to reduce competition between organizations?

Implementing Change

"Problems are easy to identify, it's harder to identify solutions." - N2N participant

Community Driven Solutions

"We are experts. We have the solutions to our problems. We need space and time to find those answers without being in survival mode."

Making systemic changes in an effort to strategically help the community, "the system does not know what the community needs, we do, we know what they need." Policy and system changes are critical in

movement building and working towards equitable outcomes. Dialogues, engagement, and listening were noted by participants as ways for those holding power to shift to a community-driven solutions model.

- “When a culture is living, breathing and has a healthy life of its own, it is a culture where people can understand others authentically and build community.”
 - By showing up, listening, and providing the support communities identify, power can be shifted from those who traditionally hold power to a model where communities’ needs, wants, and strategies are honored. “The community having the answers is indicative of power.”
 - “Giving people power and knowledge to be able to take care of their community and be their own caretaker, their own spokesperson, this will give people the power to help their community as well as others.”
- Transformative solutions involve shifts in power from agent groups to communities. This can empower communities in a variety of ways. Communities gain power when they have access to information, resources, leadership engagement, financial stability to do work, collaborative action, and having representative voices.

Participant Takeaways/Action Steps

“Building a model for advocacy that can be easily shared and adapted, especially in Indigenous communities. How can you be part of this process with us? Out there is about living and surviving.”

“It’s about allowing us the space and time to create and convene.”

“The community has the answers: have them lead the work and shape the space.”

“The need to work in solidarity without jumping to solutions when you hear about other people’s challenges. Giving people space to reach their own solutions.”

Consultant Recommendations for Community Driven Solutions:

In an effort to center community needs, how can N2N leverage community voices and promote community-identified solutions?

- Continue efforts to bring communities together to generate solutions, following the communities’ lead.
- Explore creative options for providing resources or support for this type of work.
- Support efforts to engage communities authentically.

Building Organizational Infrastructure/Capacity

“Once we meet the basic needs, the infrastructure, we’ll be able to serve more people.” - N2N participant

Participants identified several specific solutions that would help N2N grantee organizations build organizational infrastructure. Technical support, especially with “back end” and administrative work was said to be a barrier to building capacity. Bookkeeping, human resources, office support, peer consult groups, and tax assistance (including for audits) were all identified as concrete solutions.

- One N2N participant noted the need for funding to support administrative work, which usually is not covered by granting organizations.
- Other participants suggested the idea of a “nonprofit incubator space” that provides real time technical assistance for organizations.
- Additionally, another N2N participant noted the need in their organization to “set a vision and have a way to evaluate progress and outcome.”
- Final, an attendee stated that while the \$6,000 N2N grant helps organizations to either get started or advance programming, often more is needed to “get to the next level.” When groups receive the \$6,000 and no further funding, they eventually disappear.

Participant Takeaways/Action Steps

“Need to make sure funding pays for staff and not just utilize volunteer capacity.”

“Raise awareness about N2N program and get someone to apply for a grant.”

“Plug N2N, so many groups can use this resource.”

Consultant Recommendations for Building Organizational Infrastructure/Capacity:

How could N2N collaborate with grantees to support their work administratively?

- Beyond awarding grants, how could Seattle Foundation leverage their resources (including personnel and expertise) to support N2N grantees and community organizations?
- Focus on capacity building, without a solid organizational foundation transformative work is not possible.
- Provide direct support to organizations to apply to other grants and/or offer private consultation on organizational fundraising strategy.

Funder Accountability

“How can the funders respond to the community needs, based on what the organizations are telling them?” - N2N participant

Participants discussed how to collaborate with entities such as the Seattle Foundation “to restructure power.” Previous N2N grantee gatherings have identified ways for funders to increase accountability to communities, and this work remains central to “Building our Multiracial Movement Together.” In the current political climate, there is a real need to collaborate to take actionable steps to address structural racism and make changes to systems to be more accountable.

- Tokenization was cited as a barrier to accessing grant funding, illuminating the need for funders to evaluate their practices around involving and communicating with communities.
- An attendee pointed out the need for direct communication with funders, to address problematic attitudes head on instead of avoiding difficult conversations.
- Another participant stated that it is important to dedicate time to work with Seattle Foundation to have conversations despite having limited time to do so.
- “Rebel rousers are going to help with the change, funders are scared and do not want to fund rebel rousers. Reimagine what the current landscape looks like, a new system.”

Funders attending the event shared some of their struggles and concerns in supporting community-based organizations. These perspectives can help inform strategies to promote funder accountability, as well as promote collaboration between grantees and funders.

- Multiple funders commented on the difficulty of acquiring funding for grants.
- The need to investigate the selection process was cited, as well as the need to learn more about smaller community organizations doing good work.
- Another funder acknowledged having had preconceived notions about what work was important or impactful, and admitted to being wrong. This vulnerability and openness to being challenged illuminates a necessary path of humility that can be transformative, especially to combat the inherent power dynamic between funders and community organizations.

Participant Takeaways/Action Steps

“I want to go to events like Uprise and share how funding works. I want to educate funders. The students can have the knowledge to ask for funding.”

“Feel comfortable enough to ask. We all have biases, ask questions, listen, and learn.”

“The job of a funder is to listen and to be responsive to the needs that we’re hearing about. What’s challenging is there are so many needs.”

“More people from foundations need to get out on the ground.”

Consultant Recommendations for Funder Accountability:

Participants, both grantees and funders, identified the need for funders to challenge their assumptions and to award community members more power and agency in guiding funders in responsible and accountable grantmaking. How can Seattle Foundation leverage its power to support N2N grantees in the ways that they have identified to promote funder accountability?

- Engage the funder community in challenging common misconceptions on who is doing the more critical, relevant work within communities. Fund the most impactful work, as defined and demonstrated by communities themselves.
- Provide resources for funders to educate themselves on issues impacting Communities of Color, to alleviate the onus of education from the communities themselves.

Conclusion:

The Neighbor to Neighbor Annual Convening held on May 30, 2018 catalyzed dynamic and fruitful conversations by bringing together a diverse group of stakeholders to explore topics within the theme “Building our Multiracial Movement Together.” The data revealed a broad range of strategies and solutions to issues identified by N2N grantees. By building on past N2N grantee convenings, this report contributes to a host of recommendations to carry the work of addressing structural racism within philanthropy, with a focus on leveraging community voices and promoting funder accountability. As a bridge between grantees and the field of philanthropy, N2N is in a unique position to leverage community perspectives and voices to promote collaboration and systemic change.