

NOVEMBER 15, 2016



Neighbor to Neighbor Annual Convening Summary

ABOUT NEIGHBOR TO NEIGHBOR

Neighbor to Neighbor (N2N) supports grassroots efforts that increase the engagement, power, and influence of community members affected by poverty and racial disparities. N2N plays a key role in supporting the Foundation's mission to ignite powerful and rewarding philanthropy to make greater Seattle a stronger more vibrant community for all.

To do so, N2N strategies include listening and learning from our grantees, supporting grassroots community based organizations in South Seattle, White Center and Kent, connecting grantees with partners and resources, and advocating for community priorities and systems and policy changes.

“This is a time in history when we have to think how far we have come and realize that there is so much more to do, and we can't slide back.”

-Convening participant

CONVENING PURPOSE

The purpose of the N2N Annual Grantee Convening is to bring together community members, listen and learn from N2N nonprofit partners so as to better partner, advocate and share critical lessons and emerging priorities. The theme guiding the 2016 Convening was “*Finding Common Ground in Today’s Changing World*”, with the intent to build “*More bridges of dialogue, fewer barriers of division.*” The convening was an opportunity to hear about community experiences with developing partnerships, including challenges and successes in community-driven efforts to achieve racial and economic justice.



ATTENDEES

The Convening drew together a diverse crowd of community partners and funders at the New Holly Gathering Hall in South Seattle. In total, 102 people participated, including 56 community members representing 36 current and former N2N grantee organizations, 11 N2N advisory committee members or consultants, 31 people representing 14 other partners and funders and four independent facilitators participated. A list of participating organizations is provided at the end of this report.

PROGRAM

The Convening started with three separate neighborhood meetings in which community members from the Kent, South Seattle and White Center communities gathered, without funders or outside partners, to discuss topics of their choice. Comments from the previous year’s convening indicated that community members wanted more time to connect with each other, recognizing their busy schedules often didn’t allow them to get to know other groups that may have similar concerns and be doing similar work.

Neighborhood facilitators developed the agenda based on community input as they gathered. For example, Kent participants focused on the

“We are reminded again and again of the struggles so many face in this community, and our work to address inequities.”



need to formalize a council of nonprofit organizations working in Kent, and discussed issues such as competition vs. collaboration and the challenge of building trust amongst each other. South Seattle participants addressed concerns following the presidential election. They shared fears about impacts on their communities, and ways to support one another cross-culturally. They delved into potential shared strategies to increase civic engagement. White Center participants shared information about services they provide and discussed potential ways of cross-referring client families in need of assistance.

Following the neighborhood meetings, community members returned to the central room and gathered in small groups of 6-8 people. Tables were purposefully assigned to foster connections amongst community, funders, ethnic groups, neighborhoods, ages and organization missions. Conversation over a shared meal and networking throughout the evening also contributed to building relationships.

“Organizing. Partnering. Reaching out. Getting the attention and changes necessary to push progressive policies, actions, changes, that is what we aspire to and will do.”

Next, a panel discussion featured current and former N2N grantees who shared vivid examples of how and where community change is happening and needed, together with Seattle Foundation’s President and CEO, Tony Mestres, who affirmed the crucial importance of community-led efforts. Peter Bloch-Garcia from the Latino Community Fund moderated the discussion. Rebecca Saldaña, Executive Director* of Puget Sound Sage (Sage), emphasized that community groups working together can achieve more than single organizations working alone. Examples included the \$15 minimum wage and ORCA LIFT reduced transit fare—both won by coalitions of groups coordinating efforts. Debbie Carlsen, Executive Director of LGBTQ Allyship, shared her organization’s ongoing struggle to organize within their diverse constituency while also educating partner groups on the intersections of needs for housing, public safety and other issues affecting the LGBTQ community. Mary Flowers, Board President of the Village of Hope, spoke passionately about the need to take action to end the unprecedented numbers of African Americans in prison, among other injustices facing our communities and country as a whole. The panelists addressed questions from the audience. After they shared experiences and advice, Tony Mestres expressed his thanks and that he felt humbled by their wisdom and their work.



Attendees then participated in facilitated “table talks” where they shared examples of their community change work, and how and where they have built bridges and found common ground. Many told about lessons learned, including information about how they cultivated relationships with different stakeholders, including school districts, police, government entities, other institutions, philanthropists and funders.

*Ms. Saldaña has since stepped down from her position at Sage and currently serves in the Washington State Legislature.

REFLECTIONS AND LESSONS SHARED

N2N values the experience and knowledge of grantee community partners and documented comments during the convening to inform N2N program planning and future activities. Notetakers and facilitators worked to record participants’ comments in their own words, as much as possible. Following are excerpts from convening discussions, organized by topic.

Community Priorities

Nonprofit partners shared many different examples of their community work. Their communities are quite diverse, representing U.S.-born, as well as immigrant and refugee communities of many ethnicities, races and cultures. Organization missions and activities of N2N grantees cover a broad range of concerns, including improving quality of life, providing holistic human services, conducting civic engagement, organizing and advocacy. The demographically diverse community constituents of N2N grantee groups are historically underrepresented in planning and policy initiatives addressing issues of community safety, economic opportunity, immigration, health, education, and other concerns. Their community priorities regarding these and related concerns are summarized below, in their own words.

“Whatever the issue, voting, affordable housing, ensuring the voice of diverse populations is what N2N and the work of all us in this meeting today stand for.”

Coalesce groups together around urgent topics and promote civic engagement

- Bringing community members together to engage in discussions about discrimination and immigration that are important to their community
- Facilitating connections between African American pastors and the police
- Building relationships with city government, resulting in the representation of community members on diversity committees and other planning and policy efforts
- Registering community members to vote by embedding this information into social activities, such as sewing groups
- Establishing an understanding of how to gain non-profit status, secure 501(c)(3) tax-exempt designation, and made other improvements necessary to launch their organization

Promote economic empowerment

- Bringing diverse communities together to learn the United States system, and promoted their trust for and knowledge of how to access other resources (police, financial services, health services, food bank, credit repair/financial services), while increasing the ability of these systems to provide services that are driven by and responsive to the needs of the community
- Building new frameworks for business owners to think about social justice and impacts on their business
- Promoting economic empowerment by increasing the access of persons returning from the criminal justice system to the community and for, refugees and immigrants to access scholarships, mentorship and employment and training
- Developing technical skills, which one grantee referred to as “land” knowledge, and raised the resources necessary to buy a building

Promote healthy living outcomes

- Promoting a grassroots understanding among different refugee and immigrant populations of health outcomes and food policies and the problems caused by “food deserts” – areas where

healthy food is less available and/or very expensive. Grantees informed community members of how and where to access healthy food products

- Creating a social group to bring seniors together, to farm and get exercise, helping them to combat isolation, diabetes and heart disease

Influence the school system

- Creating space for students to address barriers to student's graduating, by partnering with organizations dedicated to supporting refugee and immigrant students
- Empowering parents to speak at School Board meetings, and to testify on behalf of their children
- Identifying the need for summer academic programs and advocated for a local municipality to invest in this effort

Challenges

Participants' comments highlighted the need to increase funders' and institutional partners' understanding of communities' needs, and to promote results of community change efforts. Participants also highlighted some of their everyday challenges.

“We can't wait for the horizon.
Today is the day.”

Structural racism and everyday discrimination

- The communities served by N2N aren't reflected in mainstream history.
- The LGBTQ community is not represented in many community plans and policy efforts.

Telling our own story is challenging

- It is hard to ensure that the stories about grantee work are told.
- Funders need to be educated. They need to know what matters to communities.
- More opportunities need to be created to connect the community to officials, so that they understand at the human level what is going on and where they need to provide support.

The needs are sometimes overwhelming

- New refugee and immigrant communities have extensive needs; the resources to support these needs are limited.
- Teachers don't understand kids, who were born in refugee camps, and who have lived through wars. It is hard for these children to accept their new life, and important for them to feel love and support. The fear of deportation is real. We all need to work to address the causes of the fear, and reduce the anxiety that so many face.

Community work is tiring and ongoing

- Getting volunteers involved in community change work is difficult.
- Balancing personal and community change work is hard.
- It is hard to bring people in and convince them to be part of community change efforts, especially if they come from countries that discourage such work.
- Coalitions are hard to sustain. Some bridges are not sustainable or need ongoing or additional investments to be sustained.

Inequities in funding are real

- Racism exists in philanthropy. Organizations are continually being asked to prove the value of their work.
- Large organizations get many of the community change grants. Funders should require equitable distribution of grants.
- Funder expectations can get in the way of the work, and be at odds with community expectations.
- Resources are needed to support community engagement, including computers for kids, and help with senior programs.
- Community change organizations need more general operating support so that they can function, communicate their results and achieve solutions that benefit the whole community.

Lessons Learned

Participants identified some of the lessons they learned in their community work. Examples, in their own words, are provided below.

Community is power

- We need a “collective”, we can’t build it alone.
- When there is more community ownership of community change efforts, the community change results are stronger.
- Supporting innovative ideas that come from the community is important, especially in larger, more mainstream institutions that do not typically take that approach to service delivery.
- Empowering parents is super powerful.
- Community ambassadors need training on self-care and how to set boundaries.

“All steps are stronger and bolder when taken together.”

Community must prioritize connecting to one another

- The importance of “connections” (among neighborhood providers, ethnic organizations, family members, elders and youth, community groups and schools, police, city and county government, etc.) can’t be overestimated.
- Sometimes small organizations have a tendency to work with one community, though they might be more powerful, however, if they reached out to others.
- People are people: in bringing them together they can overcome their differences (tribal, ethnic, language, age, etc.).
- Food is powerful and brings people together.
- We need to listen from each other and find out what is aligning and not aligning. Also, as one grantee said, “For whatever time you have with someone, be engaged, listen and care.”

Building bridges with allies

- Without bridge building, we can be divided and taken down.
- It is important to break down preconceived notions that institutions and community based organizations have about each other.

- Coalition work is challenging. We need to be careful with coalitions. Money can drive the process, versus the desired results.

Youth power

- We need to prepare youth for community engagement work – they are our future leaders.
- Engaging youth and showing them that the “good” they are doing is important for their future.
- Youth need to be challenged (but through the lens of doing this, demonstrate that it is because you care).
- Putting youth/students in charge, increases youth voice.
- We need to get people out into the community where youth are (to be mentors, to engage youth, and to ensure their voice and leadership in community change work).
- When working with youth, it is important to ensure they have access to a solid foundation, including housing, and help navigating systems.

Funder relationships need to be nurtured

- Funders expect you to partner with other organizations, but grantees can’t always do this easily if they don’t have a relationship in place, or know them.
- We need to remember that language can make a difference; for example, when you use the term “at risk”, finish the sentence, and say, for example, “at risk of being involved in the criminal justice system”.

SUMMARY

The Neighbor to Neighbor Convening celebrates N2N grantees and community partners’ history of community action and profoundly important work. Convening participants expressed a sense that the entire nation is facing a defining moment, and that through their efforts, the N2N community is addressing the nation’s greatest challenges. Participants voiced a strong call to strive for real understanding, to change and connect hearts as well as minds, across our differences. When reflecting later about the entire convening, Tony Mestres noted, “Every Neighbor to Neighbor gathering is rich in insights and guidance from those who work in the communities we care most about. This last N2N Convening was especially powerful and poignant given the times we are in, and our need, as Seattle Foundation, to do the best possible job of partnering and advocating for a strong and more vibrant community...for ALL.”



ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

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ORGANIZATIONS REPRESENTED

1. APACE Votes
2. Coalition of Refugees from Burma
3. Ethio-Eritrean Senior Group
4. Eritrean Community in Seattle and Vicinity
5. Coalition of Immigrants, Refugees and Communities of Color (CIRCC)
6. Circulo de Mamas
7. Colectiva Legal Del Pueblo
8. Delridge Grocery Co-Op
9. Guiding Academic Motivation for Excellence (GAME)
10. Garinagu Houngua
11. Heart of Africa Service Center
12. Iraqi Community Center of Washington
13. Iraqi Womens Association
14. Kona Kai Coffee
15. LGBTQ Allyship
16. Lao Community Service Center
17. La Sala
18. Living Well Kent
19. Mother Africa
20. New Holly Parent Leaders
21. Nsanga Corporation
22. Our Future Matters
23. Para Los Niños
24. Puget Sound Sage
25. Somali American Parent Association
26. Somali Community Services of Seattle
27. Somali Family Safety Task Force
28. Southeast Asian Education Coalition
29. Southeast Seattle Education Coalition
30. South King County Votes
31. South Park Info and Resource Center
32. Ulang County Youth
33. UTOPIA
34. Village of Hope
35. World Mind Creation Academy
36. YES Foundation of White Center



Funding and capacity building partners were also represented at the convening, including:

1. Center for Ethical Leadership
2. City of Kent
3. City of Seattle
4. King County
5. King County Elections
6. King County Housing Authority
7. Latino Community Fund
8. Medina Foundation
9. Nonprofit Assistance Center
10. Seattle People's Fund
11. Social Venture Partners
12. United Way of King County
13. Washington Womens Foundation

