

LOOKING BACK: INFLUENCING, NETWORKING, FACILITATING

*A Ten-Year Retrospective of the Funders' Network
for Smart Growth and Livable Communities*



By Neil F. Carlson

Commissioned, Produced, and Distributed by:

Funders' Network for Smart Growth and Livable Communities
1500 San Remo Avenue, Suite 249
Coral Gables, FL 33146
(305) 667-6350 phone
(305) 667-6355 fax
info@fundersnetwork.org
www.fundersnetwork.org

Written by:

Neil F. Carlson

Edited by:

Maureen Lawless, Program Director
Ben Starrett, Executive Director
Funders' Network for Smart Growth and Livable Communities

Katherine Pease, Principal
Katherine Pease & Associates

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Finally, the Network is indebted to the 30 funders who volunteered to be interviewed for this research and who gave willingly of their time to share their stories and experiences—both as members of the Network and as funders committed to advancing smarter growth policies and practices and improving the places and issues that they care about. Their input informed not only this report, but also how the Network will think about our work—and how to structure it—moving forward. We thank each of them for their involvement in this effort.



Funders' Network for Smart Growth and Livable Communities:

The mission of the Funders' Network for Smart Growth and Livable Communities is to inspire, strengthen, and expand philanthropic leadership and funders' abilities to support organizations working to improve communities through better development decisions and growth policies. Its ultimate goal is the emergence of regions that provide every person the choice to live in places that are environmentally healthy, socially equitable, and economically vibrant. The Network defines success as a world where more funders, working and learning in networks, initiate and facilitate coordinated actions to tackle the root causes of sprawl and promote sustainable, socially equitable, and economically sound land-use decisions.

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Foreword

Ten years! What began as an exploratory conversation among a few funders in 1998 and continued with a convening for 30 interested funders in the spring of 1999 has now become a network of 120 grantmaking organizations that—individually and collectively—are committed to creating places that are economically prosperous, environmentally sustainable, and socially equitable. From our beginning in 1999, the Funders' Network for Smart Growth and Livable Communities has believed that the suite of tools available to funders—investing, grantmaking, collaborating, convening, facilitating, and more—uniquely position philanthropy to play a leadership role in advancing smarter growth policies and practices that improve decisionmaking about growth and development issues, leading to more sustainable communities for all.


As we approached our tenth anniversary, we saw an opportunity to capture and celebrate stories from among our membership. We wanted to share examples of the range of tools that they are employing and the impacts they are achieving. Our goal was to tell their stories and describe the variety of approaches they are using to improve the places and advance the issues that they care about.

In 2008, we commissioned Neil F. Carlson, a writer and researcher who frequently works with philanthropy, to review materials we have generated over the years, conduct a series of interviews among Network members, capture their stories, and offer his impressions of the Funders' Network and how we work. Throughout the fall of 2008, Neil interviewed 30 funders from among our membership, both to understand how

they approach their work as well as to understand how they view and describe the Network's role. We are pleased to share with you the results of this effort, which are reflected in this *Looking Back* report. This report is complemented by another anniversary publication, *Looking Forward: Perspectives on Future Opportunities for Philanthropy*, a compilation of essays that outline opportunities for funders to consider for their future work.

As you read this report, please keep the following points in mind:

1. The report is written in the author's voice and represents his independent impression of the Network. It seeks to document—through stories—the impact of our members' efforts and to reflect on how the Network has supported their work. The report was



not commissioned as an empirical evaluation of outcomes, but rather, to document, contextualize, and explain the range of endeavors pursued both by the Network and our members.

2. As with any documentation effort, we are careful about causality. In any philanthropic endeavor, it is often difficult to determine causal linkages, given the range of actors involved. While the stories in this report may refer to the Funders' Network and our role in some efforts, they should not necessarily be interpreted to assume that the Network made them happen. Philanthropic pursuits engage a range of actors—foundations, grantees, residents, advocates, and policymakers—each of whom have important roles to play in any outcome.

3. Last, but far from least, we want to emphasize that member funders are at the center of every one of these stories. They identified opportunities, took action, collaborated, made investments, and convened important conversations. Efforts the Network supports only take root because funders decide to act, to lead, and to advance an agenda designed to result in more sustainable communities for all. We believe that the true magic happens in the spaces between the events in which Funders' Network staff are involved.

We are deeply grateful to the 30 members who volunteered to be interviewed for this report (see Appendix A). We are thankful not only for their time, but also for their ongoing commitment to improving growth and development decisionmaking. We hope that you are as inspired by their

stories—which represent just a sampling of the exciting efforts pursued by our members—as we are.

Finally, we are indebted to the board members, funders, and volunteers who have supported and guided our work over the past 10 years. We continue to be so inspired by the funder leaders we have the privilege to work with across North America. Your commitment, innovation, and leadership motivate our work, each and every day.

—*L. Benjamin Starrett,*
Executive Director,
March 2009

Introduction


Although suburbanization has been one of the defining features of post-war American society, it's easy to forget that the term “smart growth” only entered the vernacular in the late-1990s. In 1997, Maryland passed what is widely regarded as a seminal piece of smart growth legislation, providing financial and planning incentives to combat sprawling patterns of development and promote better neighborhoods. Rather than simply placing geographic boundaries on growth or zoning for higher density, smart growth proponents sought to build more livable communities. Communities where retail and residential uses existed side-by-side. Communities where parks and greenspace were plentiful. Communities that were racially, ethnically, and economically diverse. Communities where residents could walk and bike safely, and where they had access to

transportation choices. Communities with decent schools. Communities that grew not by chewing up ever increasing acres of land at the fringes of metropolitan areas, but by filling in existing urban and suburban areas.

When the Funders' Network for Smart Growth and Livable Communities (TFN) was founded in 1999, the nascent organization faced a set of overlapping challenges. On the one hand, while the Network was committed to advancing what came to be known as the “Three E's”—environment, economy, and equity—the organization needed to show how these core issues converged around this concept of smart growth; on the other hand, the Network needed to show funders how smarter growth policies and practices advanced their respective program goals (including how affecting

land-use policies and practices can produce desired community outcomes). And once those funders were persuaded that growth and development were issues to address through their grantmaking strategies, they needed practical tools for doing so.

One additional issue is worth noting. At the time the Funders' Network was founded, there was already a bevy of funder networks, including one for funders interested in environmental issues and another for funders interested in neighborhoods. The Funders' Network, however, sought to bring those funders together, so that environmental and community revitalization funders were talking to and working with one another. The reason for this connection was simple: Many issues facing metropolitan communities can't be treated in isolation. For example, the



people leaving struggling older urban neighborhoods were often the same families who were settling in the exurban communities that were eating up valuable farmland and environmentally-important lands. In short, the Funders' Network strived to create a space for more holistic and interdisciplinary discussions regarding how funders could more effectively support smarter growth policies and practices—and how those strategies would yield more livable communities for all.

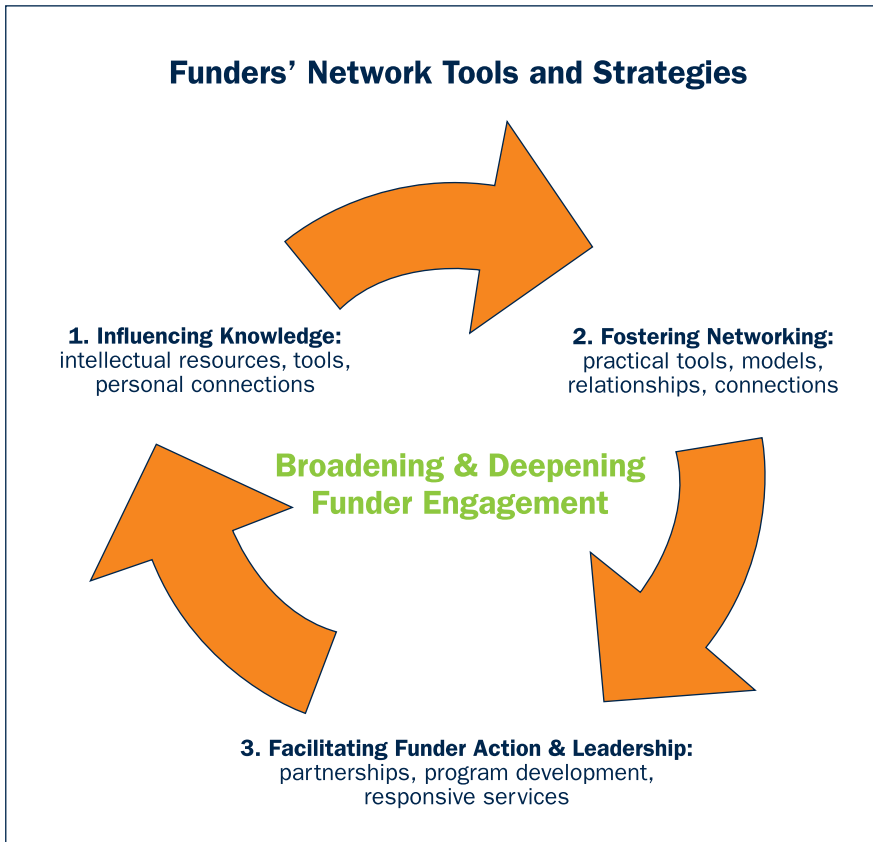
The Role of the Funders' Network: Broadening and Deepening Funder Engagement

Unlike a foundation, the Funders' Network is not a grantmaking institution, so its value does not derive

from its direct financial support for practitioners. Likewise, the Funders' Network usually does not work directly with communities or policymakers, as do conventional nonprofit organizations. Instead, its primary value proposition lies in the benefits it generates for its members—and, by extension, for the communities those members serve. The Funders' Network seeks to simultaneously **deepen** and **broaden** funder engagement around growth and development issues. In the simplest terms, the Funders' Network broadens funder engagement by creating a variety of entry points for funders to plug into growth and development work. At the same time, the Network gives members a variety of tools and strategies to support work at varying levels of experience and sophistication—thus deepening funders' praxis. Finally, the Funders' Network has created an

operating model and organizational culture that support top-flight work.

TOOLS AND STRATEGIES. Functionally, this broadening and deepening falls into three areas: 1) influencing knowledge; 2) fostering networking; 3) and facilitating funder action and leadership. While these tools obviously overlap with each other, the model provides a kind of logic for how an individual member or institution might progress through different levels of engagement with the Funders' Network. Through its translation papers, special project reports, and working groups, the Network gives members and interested funders the conceptual and analytical tools they need to connect their programmatic interest to others under the rubric of growth and development (influencing knowledge). Next, the Network helps funders build the



relationships—personal, professional, and intellectual—that they need to get traction on growth and development issues within their institution or program area (fostering networking). Finally, the Network also provides hands-on support—consulting, convening, facilitation, research, etc.—that supports and nurtures members’ work (facilitating funder action and leadership). Taken together, these tools and strategies both expand the number of funders engaging with growth and development issues and deepen their impact—on grantees, communities, and the field of growth and development writ large.

OPERATIONS AND ORGANIZATIONAL CULTURE. The Funders’ Network also benefits from having strong leadership and a lean, effective operating model. Executive Director Ben Starrett is widely regarded as an inspiring, visionary leader

who bites off a lot but has assembled around him a smart and capable staff, and supplemented the Network’s formal organization with a solid stable of consultants. This model has allowed the Network to produce a remarkable amount of products (reports, papers, etc.), while also providing a high level of service to members. In addition to these operational strengths, the Funders’ Network has managed to create a culture that is open and welcoming to different opinions and a wide range of organizational types, while remaining intellectually rigorous and true to its core values.

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Over the past decade, the Funders’ Network has grown to include 120 member institutions—including large national foundations, small family foundations, and community foundations large and small. In

aggregate, Network members have invested hundreds of millions of dollars over the past decade to support better land-use decisions, healthier communities, and more equitable metropolitan regions. Families and communities across North America have benefitted in countless ways from these investments.

This monograph uses stories to document the impact that the members of the Funders' Network have had on their communities and the places and issues they care about, and to reflect on the ways in which the Funders' Network has supported and facilitated members' work. Drawing on a decade's worth of internal documents and 30 interviews with TFN members, practitioners, and other stakeholders, this report seeks to answer two sets of questions. The first set of questions

relate to **the Network's influence on its members and philanthropy as a whole**. How did funders come to the Network and how did the Network influence members' grantmaking? What value did the Network add? How have members participated in the Network and how have they benefitted—personally and organizationally—from their involvement? The second set of questions relates to **the impact that members have had on their communities and the issues members care about**. How have members approached growth and development in their communities? How have communities benefitted? What institutional challenges have they faced, and how did they overcome them?

The report's structure mirrors these two sets of questions. In each of the three chapters, the main narrative explores

how the Network has influenced members and philanthropy as a whole, while the sidebars and member profiles offer deeper, more nuanced perspectives on how members have affected their communities and core issues. The goal of this report is not to evaluate empirically the impact the Funders' Network or its members have had, but rather to document, contextualize, and explain what its collective endeavors look like—and to capture the magnitude of these efforts. Given the policy complexity, thematic range, and geographic scope of members' efforts over the past decade, this report should be viewed not as the final word, but rather as the opening chapter in an ongoing story of how funders are striving to create more just, sustainable, and prosperous communities.

Influencing Knowledge


Early on, the Network recognized that one of the principal obstacles to a smart growth agenda was the fragmented nature of the smart growth field—specifically, that the key stakeholders (philanthropists, agents from the public and private sectors, and practitioners and advocates) weren't addressing the underlying causes of poor land-use policies and practices, much less developing the tools needed to collaborate across sectors. In a 2005 memo to members articulating its theory of change, the Network outlined the principal barriers philanthropy faced in developing comprehensive, effective approaches to land-use policies and practices. These included a lack of agreement within philanthropy regarding the nature of both the problems and their solutions; funding that is too narrow in its scope, too short in its time

horizon, and too small to be effective; and a shortage of tools, strategies, and best practices that could facilitate collaboration internally (across program silos) or externally (among foundations).

In 1999, in an effort to influence knowledge among funders, the Network published *Opportunities for Smarter Growth: Social Equity and the Smart Growth Movement*. Written by colleagues from PolicyLink, a California-based advocacy organization, it represented the first in a series of “translation papers” that sought to show how land-use decisions intersected with the various issues funders cared about. Over the next five years, the Network published 16 papers in the translation series covering topics such as air quality, energy, water, community development, arts, health, biodiversity,

children and families, education, aging, transportation reform, agriculture, civic participation, parks and open spaces, workforce development, and regional equity. Since then, the Network has begun to issue second editions for some of the earliest topics covered in the series, including *Regional Equity and Smart Growth: Opportunities for Advancing Social and Economic Justice in America*, a 2004 update also written by PolicyLink.

Over the past decade, the Network has generated a virtual learning library containing scores of documents—reports, presentations, funding guides, translation papers, surveys, speeches, articles, and foundation profiles. For funders, these products offer the conceptual and analytical tools needed to connect programmatic interests to



other areas, reaching across silos and expanding the programmatic areas encompassed by the smart growth rubric. For example: How does a traditional community development funder shift from a conventional focus on affordable housing development—where the metrics are the number of units built or preserved—to a more holistic view that looks not only at housing outcomes, but also at jobs, human health, transportation, access to health care, education, etc.? Taken together, these publications—all of which are available through the Network’s website—are designed to connect issues of importance in the movement for smarter growth to grantmakers; to demonstrate workable strategies to address growth and development concerns; to articulate opportunities for progress that would be

created by smarter growth policies and practices; and to encourage informed debate on important topics.

James Mann, executive director of the Illinois Clean Energy Community Foundation, points to how the Network’s work to influence knowledge has helped funders see the connections between green energy and other interest areas. “When we started the Illinois Clean Energy Community Foundation in 2001, green energy had very little of the cachet it does today,” Mann says. Yet, through published work, conference calls, and working groups, the Network was able “to marshal the interest of members and turn that interest into productive momentum for seeing connections and how to make positive change happen. The early green building paper and the green energy

paper—when those came out, they put on the table that energy was beyond vehicle miles driven. They broke down silos and showed how energy was embedded in a lot of issues—affordable housing, economic development, land use, health, and many more.”

Making Connections across Issues

But even more important, the tools that TFN used—the website, the translation papers, special project publications, and the annual conference—made grantmakers feel that they were personally

“The Funders’ Network is a good fit with the way we operate. We are not a single issue foundation, and one of their strengths is that you can enter into the conversation if you are an environmental funder, a social equity or justice funder, or if you are an arts or education funder. It’s not about one issue—it’s about how they all fit together. For us, that ecumenism justified that our work on gardens, land use, transportation, wilderness—all of that could be captured under rubric of creating livable communities.”

—*Mauro Vescera, former Program Director, Vancouver Foundation*

“I would say that TFN has helped funders to understand what these issues look like—to see the change that is possible in communities. When we have convened funders in places and shown them what practice looks like, it has really opened their eyes. This is what we mean. This is what it looks like.”

—*Sharon Alpert, Program Director for Environment, Surdna Foundation*

and professionally invested in making these connections.

Consider the evolution of Cheryl Casciani’s thinking about growth and development. In 2007, the

Funders’ Network held its annual meeting in Baltimore, where Casciani is director of community investments with the Baltimore Community Foundation. Casciani was on the conference planning committee and helped design some site visits around Baltimore for conference attendees. One of these sessions examined a cross-section of Baltimore County—a segment of land that ran from the poorest

urban neighborhoods, through the suburbs, and out into rural agricultural areas—demonstrating the litany of decisions that caused each area to grow and develop as it had.

Casciani’s participation in the Funders’

Network had been fairly limited prior to her involvement with the Baltimore conference. But as she was drawn in by her planning work and by conference sessions, Casciani began thinking about how she could strengthen the ties between the three grantmaking areas she oversees—neighborhoods, environment, and transportation. “I went to some of the sessions, and it just hit me that we had all these opportunities to link these issues together.”

Over the next few months, Casciani led an effort to rewrite the foundation’s grantmaking guidelines so that they better integrated principles of neighborhood equity and environmental sustainability. “When I was thinking about what we were going to do, I went to a coffee shop with a stack of issue papers and read for two hours,” Casciani says. “They do a terrific job of creating easy access to information, whether it’s about growth or green buildings, or whatever. You can easily

call them, ask for advice, and get connected to a network of people.”

Under Casciani’s leadership, the foundation rewrote its environmental grantmaking guidelines so that they were more closely aligned to the foundation’s goals for human services and education. “It’s not that the Funders’ Network was directly involved in our decision to revise our grantmaking,” Casciani says. “It’s more the connections I made through the conference and the Network. Those are the things that got me thinking.” Within the year, she says, Casciani was named as chairperson of Baltimore City’s Sustainability Commission, which was charged with developing a plan to guide the City’s Office of Sustainability. “It’s almost bizarre to look at where we are now versus where we were a year and a half ago. It’s just snowballed. We reshaped not just our grantmaking, but also our role in the community.”

Reframing “Smart Growth”

Another area where the Funders’ Network has influenced funders’ knowledge has been communications and issue framing. During the early years of the smart growth movement, advocates, practitioners, and funders were finding that while “smart growth” worked as a term of art among advocates and practitioners, it often fell flat with other audiences—policymakers, decisionmakers, and citizens. In 2003, the Funders’ Network hired ActionMedia, a renowned progressive communications consulting firm, to examine how the concept of smart growth functions in popular discourse, and to outline a more effective message frame and language for talking about the underlying issues. Drawing on data gathered from focus groups and meetings with national practitioners and funders, ActionMedia recommended that advocates of smart growth policies needed to reframe their arguments

and recast their language. Instead of talking about “smart growth,” advocates needed to talk about “growth and development”—and to root their arguments and communication messages in values and perspectives that are widely shared by residents across the geographic, racial, economic, and political spectrum. The growth and development frame is about building a better future, improving communities, and choosing how communities develop. It is about fairness—to both current and future residents—and fidelity to the idea that fair decisions will benefit the whole community. Since 2003, the Network and ActionMedia have been working with funders, practitioners, and advocates to help advance and employ the frame.

It is difficult to overestimate the influence this communication framing has had on Network members. In 2005, for instance, when the New Hampshire Charitable Foundation brought together housing, conservation, planning, business, and municipal interest

groups under the aegis of the New Hampshire Growth and Development Roundtable, the foundation relied heavily on ActionMedia’s work to help find common ground for a group of stakeholders who rarely worked together and, in many cases, saw each other as adversaries. Under New Hampshire law, land-use decisions are almost always made at the local level, which means that each of the state’s 234 municipalities are responsible for overseeing a master planning process, developing zoning ordinances, subdividing land, and reviewing land. “You’ve essentially got 234 ‘sugarbush republics’ each making their own rules—which makes it harder for all parties to get what they want,” explains Kevin Peterson, senior program officer. “When we brought the Roundtable together, we focused hard on shared values, trying to find common ground.”

Over the next 18 months, the foundation held listening sessions to flesh out parties’ concerns and to highlight how current

development trends—especially large-lot zoning regulations—were harming everyone. By providing New Hampshire municipalities with financial support for local planning, the Roundtable devised a way to give local officials the tools they needed to plan for housing and conservation as a unified strategy. In 2007, the state passed the Housing and Conservation Planning Program, which provided \$100,000 worth of matching grants in its first year to support municipal planning that considers both affordable housing and land conservation in a comprehensive fashion.

“We really focused on what we’ve come to call the housing-land conservation nexus—the idea that conservation and affordable housing are not seen as an either-or choice, but as two sides of the same coin,” Peterson says. “ActionMedia was really useful in helping us develop that frame and produce materials—including some forthcoming case studies and planning tools—that really drive that point home.”

Emphasizing Race, Equity, and Opportunity

One of the early knocks against the field of smart growth was that the movement, at least in its inception, seemed concerned mainly with limiting growth at the edges of metropolitan areas to protect open space, while paying scant attention to how urban redevelopment can harm low-income communities and communities of color. As demonstrated by the topic of its first translation paper, the Funders’ Network sought to place issues of social equity and opportunity at the heart of the growth and development agenda. Work that began in 1999 has since expanded and deepened over the years, and is now guided by the Network’s People, Opportunity, and Place (POP) Working Group. This effort represents a strategic learning network of TFN members who desire to infuse issues of equity and inclusiveness throughout the Network, to connect ongoing equity and smart growth discussions, to expand

and strengthen the network of funders concerned with equity issues, and to demonstrate the application of equity principles and models in specific places. Scot Spencer, manager of Baltimore Relations for the Annie E. Casey Foundation and current chair of the POP Working Group, credits the Funders’ Network for its willingness to deliberately insert issues of race, equity, and opportunity into conversations about smart growth. “When I was getting started in the field of smart growth, there was a wall between smart growth people, community development, and the environmental justice community. The regional equity program started to say, ‘We need a table for that conversation to happen.’” He continues, “Now we are talking about schools, transportation, jobs—and that brings in a larger array of people to the table.” The silos that funders have created don’t exist in the real world, Spencer says. “A community development effort to rehab buildings in a community will only stick if there

are all those other things. In the real world, there is a crosswalk where these issues intersect, and we've been able to acknowledge the crosswalk and to bring different funders to the work."

This focus on equity and opportunity has led the Funders' Network to explore other connections as well—particularly how these issues overlap with human health. Over the last three years, TFN has launched an effort to explore how the Network can better help funders understand how healthy communities function. Hoping to identify funders who are interested in working within a healthy communities framework, the Network has reached out to other affinity groups whose missions relate to healthy communities, and integrated a healthy communities framework within Network-sponsored funder convenings.

For Earl Johnson, formerly a senior program officer at The California Endowment (now a senior policy advisor to Oakland Mayor Ron

Dellums), the Network's focus on healthy communities is a natural extension of its work on equity and opportunity. "The Network has been able to frame smart growth in a health context, so it's not just a middle-class environmental movement," he says. "It's about access to clean water and safe land in urban and rural areas." After all, Johnson continues, urban African American and Latino communities are just as invested in healthy, livable communities, safe parks, and greenspaces as are the residents of growing exurbs. "These guys want to get their parks back. But it goes much deeper than that: It's about transportation routes, pollution, good jobs, and environmental justice."

Making Connections between National Policy and Local Action

The breadth of the Funders' Network's membership—which includes community foundations, family and

private foundations, corporate funders, health legacy funders, and other large regional and national funders—means that members are able to connect national policy to local action, conceptually and practically. Take the Berks County Community Foundation, for example. As a mid-sized community foundation, the organization lacks the resources to stay up on key policy issues. Yet through Funders' Network reports, and through the foundation's relationship with policy-oriented funders in the Network, President and CEO Kevin Murphy and his staff in Reading, Pa., developed a powerful understanding of how state and federal policy influenced what they were trying to do on the ground. "We have a knowledge of our community, but our understanding of the larger issues came through our interaction with larger players—foundations like Surdna and Gund," Murphy explains. "We fight the ground war here, but they helped us understand what the air war looks like. We would not have understood the

“One of the things that strikes me about the Funders’ Network is that it’s not bound to old ways of thinking about institutions and networks. Nor is it ideological about a particular approach—and that’s reflected in the membership, which is pretty diverse. The Network is open to exploring a variety of approaches to smart growth, which sets it apart.”

—Erika Poethig, Associate Director of Housing, John D. and Catherine T. MacArthur Foundation

importance of state and federal policy on these issues unless we were hooked into TFN. As a foundation that has two or three people for all the issues we cover, the Funders’ Network was a

good plug in for us to get smart quickly.”

In December 2003, a group of business and political leaders asked the foundation to help lead an economic planning initiative for greater Reading. Once a thriving manufacturing center, Reading had been shedding jobs for years, and city officials, citizens, and business leaders alike wanted to develop a

strategy for improving the area’s economic vitality. “It was pretty clear that Bethlehem Steel wasn’t going to buy a plant down here,” Murphy recalls. “So we had to figure out how we were going to grow our economy in a post-industrial world.”

As a next step, the foundation hired the Initiative for a Competitive Inner City, an economic research and consulting group led by Michael Porter, to help develop the plan. Given Berks County’s proximity to both New York City and Philadelphia, Murphy and others felt that Reading’s future lay not in manufacturing jobs, but in attracting creative class professionals from major East Coast cities. But as they began talking about downtown renaissances and cultural amenities—the very items that appeal to creative professionals—the planning team had to be smart about how it made its case.

“As we talked about the importance of focusing on downtown revitalization, we got all this pushback,” Murphy recalls. “So this is where we pulled out the TFN communications piece.” In an effort to focus the conversation on downtown revitalization, the foundation took skeptics for a trip to Greenville, S.C., a mid-sized city that had successfully remade its economy along the lines of what Murphy and

others had proposed for Reading. And they scheduled bus tours to the Avenue of the Arts, a cultural district in nearby Philadelphia. Eventually, the skeptics were won over. The county adopted downtown revitalization as its principal goal, and eschewed the idea of building more industrial parks in rural areas.

“The things we learned from TFN members in other areas of the country, along with the communications tools, all had a direct impact,” Murphy says. “Those things gave us the confidence and skills we needed to pull off a project of that size. If we had not participated, I’m convinced that the county’s top priority would be to create sprawl-inducing, shovel-ready sites. That means going out and finding a cornfield and building on it—in short, everything that we don’t want. Instead, we are seeing the emergence of shops, new dining options, and new life on the streets of our downtowns.”

Impact Story

Giving Members the Tools to Shape Policy ***The Neptis Foundation—Toronto, Ontario, Canada***

Throughout the 1980s, the Canadian philanthropist Martha Shuttleworth had focused most of her resources on the anti-tobacco movement. When she started the Neptis Foundation in Toronto in 1996, she was looking to support groups and issues that would have an equally big impact. “My intention from the beginning was to do something with the big picture,” she explains. “I wanted to address things at a systemic level, to move issues forward.” At the time, she says, the region surrounding Toronto was adding about 100,000 new residents per year, a growth rate with huge environmental, social, and economic consequences. The board saw an opportunity to address environmental issues in an urban context, but rather than funding organizations working on these issues, Neptis set out to fund research. “We wanted to produce reliable information that would lead to action,” Shuttleworth says.

Over the years, the Neptis Foundation has become one of the leading funders of nonpartisan, scholarly research on important public policy issues related to land use, transportation, and environmental issues in urban regions. Over the past eight years, Neptis has funded over 30 original research reports on growth management and policy issues in the Toronto metropolitan region. When the foundation was starting out, there was little public interest in comprehensive regional smart growth. Since then, however, the foundation has helped spur a renaissance among policymakers and citizens alike, transforming the scale at which issues of energy, congestion, transportation, and CO₂ emissions were addressed by the last two provincial governments.

“Liberal and conservative governments have been supportive of regional growth management,” says Tony Coombes, the foundation’s executive director. The government has created an “extraordinary apparatus” to manage regional issues—including a 30-year growth plan, a greenbelt, and a regional transport corporation called Metrolinx. “It’s hard to claim credit for all of that, but our research has definitely shaped the debate,” Coombes continues. “Government doesn’t always like what you produce because the research might not accord with political agendas, but the nonpartisan nature and quality of our research has given us credibility. It’s hard to argue with the facts.”

The Funders’ Network has been a key ally throughout the foundation’s development. Through Hooper Brooks, a founding board member of the Network, Shuttleworth met other funders who were interested in smart growth. After Neptis joined the Network, Coombes served as a board member for six years. “TFN conferences, meetings, and publications have been of great assistance to us in developing the foundation’s mission and activities,” Coombes says. “The Funders’ Network enabled us to connect in depth and breadth with the activities of other smart growth funders and the issues they faced. It provided us with an extensive network of people with whom we could discuss topics. The board structure and the excellence of staff were key to facilitating these benefits.”

Member Profile

Supporting Sustainable Communities by Linking Economic, Educational, and Environmental Change Grand Victoria Foundation—Chicago and Elgin, Ill.

In 1996, the Grand Victoria Casino in Elgin, Ill., created the Grand Victoria Foundation by committing 20 percent of its annual net operating income to fund initiatives that “help turn local communities into vibrant civic hubs.” Since then, the Grand Victoria Foundation has developed a grantmaking strategy that seeks to link economic development, education, and the environment by giving local institutions the tools and resources they need to work across issue areas. Inspired partly by the Funders’ Network, the foundation has emphasized learning, networking, and working from the ground up.

A Start-Up Strategy

When the Grand Victoria Foundation was established in 1996, the foundation’s staff and board faced the enviable, if daunting, challenge of creating a funding strategy to fulfill its mission: to assist communities in their efforts to pursue systemic solutions to problems in specific areas of education, economic development, and the environment. According to Nancy Fishman, the foundation’s founding executive director, the foundation’s strategy was guided by the belief that *how* the foundation went about its work was indivisible from *what* the foundation funded. “From the beginning, we have tried to look at issues as a set of connected factors, rather than ‘Here’s what we do in each area,’” she says. “The central frame of our foundation has been to try to use our philanthropic tools to connect work on those issues,” she continues. “And it’s hard, because practitioners often don’t view their work as connected.”

Fishman credits her involvement with the Funders’ Network as one of the main inspirations for this integrated approach. In 1999, the foundation

joined the Funders’ Network and began to sharpen its focus. That year, the foundation made a grant to support the start-up of Chicago Metropolis 2020, a regional planning effort sponsored by the Commercial Club of Chicago (a membership organization of business and civic leaders) also supported by the John D. and Catherine T. MacArthur, Joyce, and Gaylord and Dorothy Donnelley foundations. The foundations met periodically to discuss how their grantmaking intersected with the work of the 2020 initiative, but as the network of funders expanded, the group realized it needed a strategy for taking the work to the next level of collaboration.

That year, the funders brought in the Funders’ Network to help organize the discussion and conduct a regional scan. “We really wanted to find ways to be better partners with each other.” Fishman says. “I think that was a very powerful turning point for the group, because the larger the group became, the harder it was to have a deep understanding of what we were all doing.” The Funders’ Network convened a meeting of grantmakers and practitioners to discuss where stakeholders were getting traction and where the gaps lay.

Building Networks and Working in Place

Impressed with the Funders’ Network’s emphasis on learning and networking, Fishman and her colleagues at Grand Victoria Foundation set out to develop a similar approach. The foundation dedicates about three-quarters of its funding to “leadership initiatives,” strategies that create innovative, locally-based solutions across three key issues: early childhood care and education, workforce development, and land use and protection.

“One of the things that the Funders’ Network has helped me see is that place matters,” Fishman says. “Even if you are tackling big issues across a big area—in our case, the state of Illinois—you have to engage citizens in ways that matter to them if you want to get the job done.” Fishman points to the foundation’s Communityworks Initiative as a principal example of this approach. A partnership of 16 community foundations throughout the state, Communityworks supports foundations’ efforts to address early childhood care, workforce development, and land use and protection by providing financial support for general operations and for challenge grants to build endowed assets, along with ongoing technical assistance and coaching.

“The other piece of this is that the Funders’ Network really inspired us to think about the power of networks,” Fishman says. “We are a small organization and there’s no way we could have intimate knowledge of all those communities, nor the network of relationships we needed to make good judgments. Our answer was to do this work with and through community foundations. The Funders’ Network shows you the importance of having strong networks to really put wheels on your bus. You have to think about how you can achieve a multiplier effect by networking well. That came out of TFN.”

The Tools and Language to Lead

Fishman underscores the point that being able to work in local communities requires that the foundation be especially attuned to language and framing. “When I talk with people in local communities, I really see how resonant

certain messages are. Like choice: It’s so important for folks to feel they have choices.” This attention to language, Fishman notes, emerged from the Funders’ Network as well, particularly ActionMedia’s work on message framing and talking about growth and development. “When you’re on the ground, you see how smart growth is probably not the right frame if what you are really trying to do is help people understand how what they do plugs into other quality of life issues. If I’m talking to funders who have an interest in education, I talk about land use in the context of where schools get sited and how a school’s location affects access to quality education. It’s meeting people where they are instead of promoting a Grand Victoria agenda.”

Overall, Fishman credits the Funders’ Network with giving her the tools and resources she needed to lead a start-up foundation. “They really gave me the confidence I needed to take some risks—risks in terms of venturing into very significant investments in an emerging practice. As a new foundation, that was particularly helpful. I knew that I could draw on the support and expertise of others. If I want to think through changing our grantmaking strategies to encourage more sustainable growth and development patterns, there are lots of folks in the Network who have worked on the ground experience. And you get something much richer than the 30,000-foot view of the success story—you actually get practical tools and strategies.”

Member Profile

Taking an Integrated Approach to Community Development and Environmental Programming **William Penn Foundation—Philadelphia, Pa.**

In 1998, the William Penn Foundation, a family foundation based in Philadelphia, set out to merge its environmental and community revitalization program areas. In 2000, the foundation embarked on a strategic planning process that would culminate in the creation of a new Environment and Communities program that focused explicitly on creating livable communities by understanding and embracing the rich interconnection of the Philadelphia region's natural and built environments. Since then, the foundation has invested roughly \$20 million per year into strategies that seek to balance restoration and protection of watersheds and related ecosystems with revitalization of the region's diverse communities. In the process, the William Penn Foundation has emerged as a national model for how funders can support more robust, equitable, and sustainable regions.

A Balanced Approach Takes Shape

When the foundation embarked on its strategic planning process in 2000, the wisdom of combining environmental and community development grantmaking under one program was still a point of debate among the board and staff. “When we first proposed continuing the recently merged Natural and Physical Environment program, there was some concern that our work would be diluted,” recalls Geraldine Wang, director of the foundation’s Environment and Communities program. “I always go back to the foundation’s mission. It’s a mission that cares deeply about place and people: to improving the quality of life in the Greater Philadelphia region through efforts that foster rich cultural expression, strengthen children’s futures, and deepen connections to nature and community. And I believed

that an integrated approach to grantmaking was the best route to take to get us to that vision.”

For guidance, Wang turned to the Funders’ Network’s translation papers, circulating them among the foundation’s staff and board and using them as the jumping-off point for a broader discussion of how a regional approach to growth and development fit with the foundation’s goals. “They were instrumental in the early years in informing our grantmaking,” Wang recalls. “In those early years, the Funders’ Network was our link to the broader field, to learning and best practices in an emerging branch of philanthropy. The translation pieces helped us to frame issues and were critical resources as we developed our program’s objectives and strategies.”

Ramping Up

The new Environment and Communities program, launched formally in 2001, recognizes the dynamic, interconnectedness of the region’s natural and built environments in its four priority areas: 1) protecting and conserving significant natural landscapes; 2) protecting, conserving, and restoring water resources; 3) improving regional prosperity and competitiveness; and 4) revitalizing greater Philadelphia’s urban core. Says Wang, “We explicitly decided not to refer to our strategy as ‘smart growth’ because we wanted to define it through our guidelines and grantmaking.”

As the foundation rolled out the Environment and Communities program, the Funders' Network provided hands-on assistance to execute its strategy. In 2003, the foundation made a grant to the Funders' Network to help strategize, convene stakeholders, and identify potential funding allies in the Eastern Pennsylvania and Southern New Jersey regions. According to Wang, Ben Starrett, the executive director of the Funders' Network, and his team of staff and consultants brought critical national expertise and experience to facilitate discussions among funders and other key stakeholders to help the foundation shape and advance its strategic agenda.

More broadly, the foundation has relied on the Funders' Network as a wellspring of innovative thinking and best practices. "In a field that is grounded in complex systems thinking, they've been a great colleague and sounding board to test ideas and strategies, keep abreast of trends, and identify potential collaborations," Wang says.

Signs of Change Emerge

Over the years, the foundation has continued to emphasize the importance of collaboration and cross-sectoral work. "When I meet with grantseekers, I'll describe our program priorities and the foundation's mission to advance a 'vital, just, and caring community,'" Wang says. "So, it's clear that we're committed to an integrated approach that aligns the interests in the region around a shared vision and agenda." This, she adds, can be achieved only if the region's business, government, and nonprofit sectors work together in strategic alliances.

By all available evidence, the foundation's integrated approach is catching on. "The language has changed and common themes have emerged. In the community development sector, we now talk about 'balanced development' and 'healthy and sustainable communities,'" Wang says. In Philadelphia, what began as an environmental policy initiative morphed into a campaign, the Next Great City, that some mistook for a community development agenda. The campaign's action agenda defied traditional sector silos and brought together an unprecedented group of over 110 organizations with differing missions. "Although each organization may approach the issue from a different perspective," Wang continues, "there has been a change in thinking towards a much more nuanced outlook that understands the interconnectedness of environment and communities."

Fostering Networking

If the Network's efforts to develop and provide knowledge resources were the entry point for many Funders' Network members—the place where they were able to see how their interests connected to others under the broader rubric of growth and development—the next step was to help individuals and institutions develop their own funding strategies and hone their grantmaking practices. The principal tool for this step was networking. Over the years, the Funders' Network has built overlapping structures—both formal and informal—to help individual members connect to and learn from one another.


Formal Networking: Learning Networks and Working Groups

Learning networks have been central to the Funders' Network model from its

inception. One of the Network's first projects was the Equity Learning Action Network (LAN), a partnership with PolicyLink that sought to broaden and diversify the constituency for growth and development by placing equity concerns at the center of the Network's agenda. Over the first two years, the Equity LAN published a handful of resources that addressed issues at the nexus of growth and equity, including the 2001 report *Achieving Equity Through Smart Growth: Perspectives from Philanthropy*, which was co-published by the Funders' Network and PolicyLink.

In 2002, the partners co-hosted the first Promoting Regional Equity Summit in Los Angeles. The summit drew more than 650 participants and launched a new phase of work, which the Network called its Regional and Neighborhood

Equity Project (RNEP). The partners collaborated again to co-host a second national summit, Advancing Regional Equity, which was held in 2005 in Philadelphia and attended by more than 1,300 participants. In preparation for the second summit, RNEP undertook a national and regional mapping project of organizing groups working on metropolitan and regional equity issues and published a report, *Signs of Promise: Stories of Philanthropic Leadership in Advancing Regional and Neighborhood Equity*. “We wanted to bring the voices of a new generation of activists and philanthropists into the conversation about smart growth,” says Carl Anthony, a former Ford Foundation program officer who funded RNEP through the foundation's Sustainable Metropolitan Communities Initiative. “These were people who were really concerned about environmental, social,



and economic justice and poverty. And to do that, we needed to move towards a more multicultural approach.”

This early work on regional and neighborhood equity became a template for how the Funders’ Network would use learning networks/working groups to help members learn about issues, build promising practices, and share funding strategies. In the early part of the decade, the Network catalyzed and staffed several additional working groups based on this model. One was focused on real estate finance and smart growth, another on community foundation leadership.

Learning networks and working groups develop as a result of funder interest in and leadership on a particular subject. Today, the Network supports issue-based working groups

in four areas: 1) Green Buildings and Green Neighborhoods; 2) Restoring Prosperity in Older Industrial Cities; 3) Transportation Reform; and 4) People, Opportunity, and Place. As these working groups evolved, the Funders’ Network typically invested some resources into expanding the network and formalizing the content. In most cases, this involves creating a funders’ steering committee, offering staff support, and collaboratively developing tangible work plans. It is a model that seeks practical solutions to the concrete challenges funders face in their day-to-day work.

To complement the working groups, the Funders’ Network launched in 2007 a “Learning Network” series of monthly conference calls that allow interested funders to exchange ideas, build relationships, and share best practices

on cutting-edge issues. Calls are open to any funder who wants to learn more about the topic at hand—participants need not be a Network member—but Learning Network calls are typically about learning and networking, as opposed to formal collaboration or partnership.

“The Funders’ Network has been very helpful in getting folks in a room to talk about common issues. They helped us develop a working group of funders working in older industrial cities and helped bring together funders in states to support statewide smart growth policies. As a national funder, they provide us with additional convening capacity that helps us better connect with our foundation colleagues at the state, regional, and local levels.”

—*Kim Burnett, Program Director for Community Revitalization, Surdna Foundation*

Impact Story

Creating Greener Communities

Green Building and Green Neighborhoods Working Group

In 2005, a small group of Funders' Network members began talking informally about the opportunities that exist at the intersections of green buildings, green neighborhoods, and smart growth. Led by Jon Jensen, then a program officer at the Cleveland-based George Gund Foundation, the funders conducted an online survey of dozens of funders to gauge the level of interest. "The response was overwhelming," Jensen recalls. To build on this newfound interest, Jensen asked the Funders' Network to host a national conference for funders. Demonstrating its commitment to collaboration, the Funders' Network invited several other funder networks to participate as co-sponsors. The conference was held in Cleveland in October 2005.

Drawing on the enthusiasm emerging from the conference, the Funders' Network created the Green Building and Green Neighborhoods learning network. The group's work plan calls for supporting funder collaboration on issues such as providing technical assistance and support to cities that are working to reduce their carbon footprints, assessing state and federal policy opportunities, and strengthening green building standards. Equally important, the learning network has brought together funders from a variety of program areas, including healthy/active living, affordable housing, workforce development, education, climate change, and transportation. "We see this as an opportunity to help cement the bonds between green building and smart growth," says Jensen, now the executive director of the Park Foundation in Ithaca, N.Y.

"The emergence of the green building group is really about TFN being strategically opportunistic," Jensen continues. "They are close enough to their members that they have early insight into what members' interests are, what trends are out there in the grapevine. So if the interest is there, they throw some resources into it. Once that buzz and energy builds, it becomes more formalized. The take away is that I'm hard pressed to think of another affinity group that would have been willing to take on something like this, and to pull it off as well as they did. For me, it's really a hallmark of their willingness to extend beyond their mission at times to keep growing. Now, they have funders thinking about green buildings as a smart growth issue. That agility is critical."

Just three years-old, the working group has already influenced how members approach their work. The George Gund Foundation, for example, is considering a policy that will only support construction of LEED-certified buildings in its community development and housing programs. "We would never even be thinking about this if it were not for the Funders' Network," says John Mitterholzer, senior program officer for the environment at Gund. Through the learning network, Mitterholzer was able to connect with the Kresge Foundation and Heinz Endowments, foundations that already had robust green building policies. "They told me what to do and what not to do," he says.

Informal Networking: Meetings, Conferences, and Relationship Building

Beyond formal networking opportunities, the Funders' Network has diligently used informal networking as a tool to align resources and strengthen the effectiveness of members' work. In particular, the Network's annual conference has emerged as a site for peer-to-peer networking, relationship building, and collaboration. "I think one of the things that the Funders' Network has done really well has been to make their national gathering an open, welcoming place," says Anne McEnany, senior advisor to the environment and conservation program at the International Community Foundation (and a former consultant to TFN). In particular, the Network goes out of its way to create informal venues—meals, site visits, and small-group receptions—where members can relax and get to know each other. As

McEnany observes, "People also seek TFN events out because of the emphasis on place and place-based learning that the meetings offer. Everyone I talk to has mentioned a powerful experience they had where they went on a site visit and talked to local practitioners. They have a much better understanding of those places because they walked on sidewalks, looked at buildings, and had experts explain the relationship between the two."

Echoing this sentiment, Gail Imig, program director at the W.K. Kellogg Foundation, points to how the Network has used food as a tool for cementing relationships among members. "One of the things that strikes me is how, at each of these national meetings, the Network provides a reception featuring local food. Sometimes it's been called slow food, sometimes local food. But it's about farmers and local eateries providing local, fresh, healthy food for people to enjoy." She continues, "Rural women for generations have known

that food is the foremost community organizing tool. It's a way to express culture. It's a way to bring people together. It's an expression of place. The conference also has a focused session on food and food systems and the potential impact on families and communities. It's a wonderful way to open the eyes of foundations about what can happen when you invest in local food and local food systems to enhance sustainable communities."

The networking opportunities fostered by the Funders' Network are not limited to the annual conference. Take Nancy Van Milligen's story, for example. Van Milligen, President/CEO of the Community Foundation



“As a member of the Funders’ Network, you know you’re not working in a vacuum. There are others working on other aspects of what you are doing. That really resonates with this community of funders, so you know that this is the right place to be.”

—Dana Bourland, Senior Director,
*Green Communities, Enterprise
Community Partners*

of Greater Dubuque (Iowa), began participating in Network activities in 2005, just two years into the foundation’s existence. With a commitment to creating a better Dubuque, Van Milligen made connections that have helped her community become a national leader in sustainability. It started with her participation in the River Partnership of Community Foundations, an effort throughout the 10-state Mississippi River Corridor region, which is staffed by the Funders’ Network. At the Partnership’s second meeting, held in St. Paul, Minn., in December 2005, Van Milligen saw first-hand the success of innovative efforts to renovate St. Paul’s riverfront warehouse district. Inspired by what she saw, Van Milligen returned home and organized a tour to the Twin

Cities—hosted by contacts she made through the River Partnership—in order for her community’s local leaders to learn more about riverfront redevelopment. Likewise inspired, the leaders subsequently launched a similar effort in Dubuque. Meanwhile, at another Funders’ Network meeting, Van Milligen met Michelle Knapik, environment program director at the Geraldine R. Dodge Foundation in New Jersey, who introduced Van Milligen to Neil Seldman of the Institute for Local Self-Reliance, an expert in the reuse of materials from building demolition. Dubuque has since added that sustainable enterprise to its community’s assets. While the Network facilitates opportunities for funders to connect with and learn from one another, Van Milligen’s energy and follow-up resulted in tangible action.

Impact Story

Supporting Foundation Leadership around Growth and Development *The Essex County Forum—Essex County, Mass.*

In 1999, the Essex County Community Foundation (based in Danvers, Mass.) launched the Essex County Forum, a partnership of state and county officials, professional planners, and everyday citizens who want a future for their communities that balances growth and development with preservation of their natural, cultural, and historic resources.

“The Forum’s vision is that, by working together, we can provide the education, networking opportunities, technical assistance, and leadership required to ensure that Essex County is a wonderful place to live, work, and play well into the future,” says Mary Whitney, the Forum’s director.

The Forum’s work encompasses four service offerings: workshops, online resources, technical assistance, and facilitation of partnership and collaboration. The workshops provide education and sharing of best practices. The online resources, available through the Forum’s website and quarterly e-news, offer planners and policymakers tools they can use and up-to-date information. Technical assistance makes professional planning advice available at the local level. One of the most valuable roles the Forum plays is that of convening a regional dialogue about where and how communities want to grow through the fostering of partnerships and collaboration that cross disciplines and organizational boundaries.

If this model sounds familiar to the Funders’ Network, Whitney notes, it’s because the two organizations share a long, close, synergistic relationship. “It’s no coincidence we have the same birthday,” Whitney

says, adding that Sandy Buck, the Forum’s founder, was an early member of the Funders’ Network. “The Funders’ Network is pretty entwined with everything we do.”

As a project of a community foundation, the Forum has turned to the Funders’ Network to stay in tune with national trends and ideas. “The learning network calls, the annual conference, and TFN publications have been instrumental in helping us at the local level because it keeps us at the cutting edge of where the field is going,” Whitney says. “The Funders’ Network provides us with knowledge that we can share with people who work in this area, many of whom are volunteers with precious little free time and who don’t have a background in planning.”

The Funders’ Network has identified the Essex County Forum as a resource and model for other funders and has highlighted its work as an example of a foundation initiative. For example, in 2007, Whitney gave a presentation on the Forum’s work at the Network’s annual conference, which helped inform a similar effort sponsored by the Chesapeake Bay Funders Network. In turn the advisors and committee members of the Forum are learning from the progress being made in the Chesapeake Bay. “Without the Funders’ Network, we wouldn’t have had the information sharing and learning between two organizations based in very different places but with very similar goals,” Whitney says. She adds, “It has given us the opportunity to expand our knowledge of what works and what doesn’t in our communities.”

Member Profile

Planning for Sustainable Growth and Development The Community Foundation of Western North Carolina— Asheville, N.C.

In 2006, The Community Foundation of Western North Carolina set out to help citizens and communities plan for responsible growth throughout an 18-county Appalachian region. After several months of planning with staff and board, the foundation launched the Mountain Landscapes Initiative in the summer of 2007. Over the next year, the foundation led a comprehensive process of research, convening, and community-based planning. In July 2008, the Mountain Landscapes Initiative published a growth-and-development “toolbox” of best practices for growth and development planning in the region. Today, the foundation has established itself as a leading voice for balanced, responsible growth and development in this ecologically and economically diverse region of rolling mountain farmland.

A Foundation Steps Up

A few years ago, the board of The Community Foundation of Western North Carolina decided that the institution needed to play a more significant leadership role to address the issues that had the greatest impact on life in the 18-county region that the Asheville-based foundation served. In May 2006, the foundation asked the UNC School of Government to conduct a study of key issues affecting the region. “We expected them to come back with school drop outs, access to health care, obesity,” recalls Bob Wagner, vice president of programs. “But we were surprised to find that growth and development were the top issues.”

In recent years, the region had become a hot destination for second homes. With a surfeit of forest land and pristine rivers, the area is one

of the nation’s most biologically diverse regions, with more ecological diversity than all of western Europe combined. Yet many counties were contending with annual growth rates of 25 percent. “True, we’re talking about communities with small populations, but when you have 20,000 residents and you are going to have 35,000 in the next 10 years, you have to plan,” Wagner says. Mountain ridgelines are fragile ecosystems, and rivers and streams could be clogged with sediment.

Yet this was Appalachia, Wagner notes, a region that has always prided itself on its bootstrap mentality. “We realized pretty quickly that if we were going to do this, we needed a planning process that reflected the character of the region,” Wagner says. “We also realized we needed to have broad buy-in, so we needed to create a process that really involved residents. But, to tell you the truth, getting out ahead on a potentially controversial issue was new for us.”

Networking and Learning from Others

Wagner was charged with helping the board get comfortable stepping into a leadership role. “We had a lot of work to do with the board,” Wagner says. “Understandably, they were concerned that we would end up on the wrong side of an issue, or that we would antagonize donors, so it was my job to convince them that this was the right thing to do.” Around this time, Wagner became involved with the Funders’ Network and began forming connections that would not only help win over the board, but would guide the foundation’s overall direction.

Wagner attended the Network’s annual conference in 2007, where he met representatives from other community foundations that had done similar activities to what his organization was trying to do. “The Funders’ Network

was helpful in helping me put parameters around what this could look like,” Wagner says. The Network’s 2006 report on community foundation leadership, *Promising Returns: Improving Communities and Community Foundations through Leadership*, proved to be an invaluable resource. “It was great to hear stories of what different community foundations had done.” In early 2007, Wagner invited Kevin Murphy, president of the Berks County Community Foundation in Reading, Pa., down to Asheville to address the board. “It was really helpful for the board to hear from another community foundation guy—someone who seemed reasonable and could assure them that we were not the first to go out there, sheep to the slaughter,” Wagner says.

The Mountain Landscapes Initiative

In the summer of 2007, the foundation launched the Mountain Landscapes Initiative, a partnership with the Southwestern Commission (the council of municipal governments for the 18-county region), to produce a “toolbox” of best practices for planning and development in the mountain region. The Community Foundation put up \$100,000 in seed money to get the project underway, and recruited the Cherokee Preservation Foundation and the Z. Smith Reynolds Foundation as funding partners.

The toolbox pilot evolved in three stages. First, the foundation’s research team interviewed 75 citizens, community leaders, developers, and government officials to help identify the key growth and development issues. “It was really important to us to get a broad cross section of opinion,” Wagner says. Based on these interviews, the research team developed a set of 10 questions to help guide the next phase of the project: an eight-day public charrette workshop at Western Carolina University. The workshops formed the basis of the final step: publication of

an exhaustive toolbox that covered community planning, site and building design, transportation, environmental protection, cultural and landscape preservation, open space conservation, affordable housing, farmland preservation, and economic systems. Over 1,000 citizens participated in the community meetings and charrette.

A Leadership Institution

Since its publication in July 2008, the toolbox has received a warm welcome in all quarters. The Initiative garnered two front-page stories in the *Asheville Citizen-Times* and a pair of laudatory editorials. The foundation has already established a Next Steps Fund—a \$150,000 grant pool that will support communities as they seek to implement the toolbox.

“I think one of the things that has really helped us is that we had skin in the game,” Wagner says. “The fact that we seeded this with \$100,000 got people’s attention. They realized that they needed to step up, too.” Banks and developers put in money, Wagner notes, adding that the foundation’s seed money ended up broadening and deepening participation. “It’s been a whole range of folks to participate. And that was by design. If they are invested financially, they will be more likely to participate,” Wagner says.

In the end, the risk the foundation took paid off. Based on the Initiative’s success, the foundation is widely viewed as a leader in the region. “Epilogue for this is that we are looking at how we can get out in front with leadership,” Wagner says. “It’s also helped us turn another corner culturally, in terms of how we think about our work. You can’t talk about the issues we care about without talking about the impact of growth and development.”

Member Profile

Emerging as a Community Leader through Visioning and Planning **Community Foundation of Greater Dubuque—Dubuque, Iowa**

When the Community Foundation of Greater Dubuque launched in 2003, the foundation initially engaged in transactional philanthropy—raising money from donors and giving it out according to their wishes. As a result, in part, of its involvement in the River Partnership of Community Foundations (a Funders' Network initiative), the foundation has stepped into a leadership role in the community, organizing a community visioning process that featured a host of sustainable land-use and economic development projects.

The Leadership Epiphany

When the Community Foundation of Greater Dubuque opened its doors for business on February 1, 2003, the foundation's new board was still feeling its way. "The board was new and we didn't fully understand at the time the depth and breadth of the work that community foundations do," recalls President/CEO Nancy Van Milligen. "There was more of a sense that we were like a bank for nonprofits or a philanthropic support group. We hadn't really thought about community leadership or how to raise funds for specific purposes."

In 2005, the foundation would receive a crash course in foundation leadership when it was invited to join the River Partnership of Community Foundations. At the Partnership's initial exploratory meeting in New Orleans in April 2005, the conversation turned to how community foundations could lead civic conversations about land use, planning, and economic development—and Van Milligen realized that this was precisely what her foundation needed to do. "I had been toying with how our community

foundation could lead a community-wide visioning process to raise our credibility, and this was just the push I needed," she says.

Envisioning the Future of the Community

In 2005, the foundation partnered with the Dubuque Chamber of Commerce to launch ENVIS10N 2010, a community visioning process that aimed to flesh out the 10 best community projects for making Dubuque a better place to live, work, and play. Nearly 500 people attended the kick-off breakfast, where they received visioning toolkits. Over the next 18 months, informal groups met regularly to plan and discuss their ideas. For Van Milligen and her colleague Steward Sandstrom, former director of the Chamber of Commerce, who co-chaired a nine-person steering committee, the key to ENVIS10N's success was to focus on implementation. "We spent three months planning," Van Milligen recalls. "The rest of the year was convening and marketing."

As the process wound down, a selection committee, chosen for its diversity, vetted the 100 best ideas from a list of 2,300 ideas. They presented them at a town meeting, where 300 attendees voted on their favorite ideas, narrowing the list to 30. Based on these recommendations, the selection committee chose the top 10, which were then handed over to the community. Ideas included: an integrated hiking/biking trail, expanded mental health and substance abuse services, a community health center, and riverfront redevelopment. "It was really satisfying to hand over the baton," Van Milligen says.

A Leader Emerges

The results have been better than anyone could have hoped for. All 10 ideas are moving forward, and the Crescent Community Health Center is open for business. In June 2007, ENVIS10N was cited by the awards committee when Dubuque was chosen as an All-America City by the National Civic League. Just as important, the visioning process established the foundation as a community leader. “It allowed us to understand the potential that we have as a community leader,” Van Milligen says. “It has put us at tables that we wouldn’t have been invited to before.”

It has also helped with fund raising. By 2007, foundation assets had reached almost \$13 million, up from just under \$1 million in 2003. In 2008, the foundation became the home for two new endowments to support organizations that focus on the Mississippi River. The National Mississippi River Museum and Aquarium is committed to raising \$5 million in endowed funds as part of its capital campaign. Meanwhile, the Mississippi River Parkway Commission has turned to Van Milligen and her colleagues to house an endowment and fund-raise nationally.

“My board sometimes struggles with the fact that we appear to be stretched thin,” Van Milligen says. “But I keep going back to a bicycle analogy: One wheel is the programs and community leadership, the other is the financial assets. One fuels the other. If we aren’t exhibiting community leadership, we aren’t relevant. As long as the financial assets are growing (the front wheel), it is our charge to keep turning the community knowledge/leadership (the back wheel).”



Facilitating Funder Action and Leadership

One of the most striking features of the Network's efforts over the past decade is the extent to which the Network has helped to facilitate funder action and leadership through scanning, convening, research, facilitation, and program development and management.

While somewhat unusual for a funder affinity group, the Network's role as a facilitator of funder action is rooted in the core belief that funders can and should lead on these issues—partly as a means of inspiring and supporting leadership among their grantees. In 2001, the Network launched the Strategic Assessment Project, a scan of the smart growth/livable communities movement—a project that would become a template for how the Funders' Network combined research, convening, and networking to facilitate funder action. The Project's goals were two-fold: to identify the key policy issues

facing the movement, and to flesh out the organizational needs facing funders, practitioners, and policymakers. During the course of the two-year project, the Funders' Network hosted 12 regional listening and strategy sessions, covering 31 states and one Canadian province. The research included 50 funders and 500 leaders representing a broad cross-section of interests.

Concluded in 2003, the project created a blueprint that influenced the Network's priorities and decisions in subsequent years. For example, when the strategic assessment found that effective communications was one of the weakest skill sets among the proponents of smarter growth, the Funders' Network brought in ActionMedia to work on message framing and communication. Just as importantly, the model of research, convening, and

influencing knowledge that emerged from the assessment project became a template for the program development and planning work the organization would undertake in the future. Since then, the Network has helped support the development of regional partnerships in the Bay Area, Ohio, the Twin Cities, New England, Chicago, Pennsylvania and New Jersey, the ten-state Mississippi River Corridor, and the tri-state metropolitan New York City region of New York, New Jersey, and Connecticut. In addition, the Network provides a range of “responsive services” (see sidebar), which address members' programmatic and strategic needs, while also advancing the Network's overall mission.

Funders' Network Responsive Services

- Staffing regional funder collaboratives
- Providing logistical support for funder-led convenings
- Facilitating meetings
- Scanning and mapping opportunities and issues
- Providing training, advising, network building, and funder-to-funder matching
- Conducting assessments
- Providing strategic advice
- Developing grantee selection criteria and evaluation frameworks
- Improving communication and messaging

By engaging in consulting, convening, and on-the-ground work, the Network gains the experience and feedback loops needed to articulate a vision for more sustainable communities. And by articulating that vision through its efforts to influence knowledge and foster networking, the Network is able to help members move in new directions. As more funders engage in growth and development work, the Network is able to offer them the

practical tools and support they need to do their own work on the ground. Broadly speaking, these efforts fall into three overlapping areas: influencing individual funders, strengthening philanthropic institutions, and fostering funder collaboration.

Influencing Individual Funders

For the first six years of his tenure at The McKnight Foundation,

Dan Bartholomay (who became Commissioner of Minnesota Housing in January 2009) oversaw a fairly conventional community development program. But as he became more involved with the Funders' Network, he began thinking about ways to integrate traditional community development concerns—such as affordable housing and workforce development—with broader issues of growth and development, like public transit, regional development, and open space.

A little over five years ago, Bartholomay and The McKnight Foundation launched a revamped Regions and Communities program, which sought to foster affordable housing, sustainable regional growth, open space preservation, transportation alternatives, and economically-viable

neighborhoods. Throughout the development process, Bartholomay drew on the knowledge and relationships he had garnered through the Funders' Network.

“In some ways, the Funders' Network

“The Funders' Network has changed our approach by urging us to think about how we can cooperate with a diversity of nonprofits at local and regional levels. A lot of the site visits I went on at national conferences gave me ideas of things we ought to be trying. Hopefully, we did the same for national funders.”

—Marty Fluharty, Executive Director,
Americana Foundation

was evolving at the same time as my program,” he says. “I used the Network to test ideas about ways we might work.” Bartholomay used the Network's publications and background materials to inform The McKnight Foundation's internal deliberations. “The Network's communications materials—especially around the message of having citizens involved in making choices about the long-run impact of growth—had a big influence on how we talk about the relationship between inner-city development and edge development.”

As Bartholomay's program took shape, the feedback loops between McKnight and the Funders' Network developed even further. McKnight supports the River Partnership of Community Foundations and the Central Corridor Funders Collaborative and Learning Network, both of which are key elements of the Network's efforts to facilitate funder action and leadership. “TFN is about making connections across silos,” Bartholomay says, noting that TFN's work influenced McKnight, and vice versa. “It was a mutually-reinforcing concept. I've used a lot of that as ballast. I've used their networking capacity around leadership services to bring in funders here to focus on issues.”

The Funders' Network also influenced how Bartholomay approached change within the foundation itself. Instead of commissioning a research project or drafting a program memo for the board, Bartholomay developed a learning agenda for the board and

nonprofit collaborations (a process, Bartholomay notes, not unlike what TFN does with its learning networks.)

“The learning agenda really helped deepen our understanding of the issues and created buy-in among board members,” he says. “It took us in directions we weren't thinking about before.” The housing program, for instance, places a much greater emphasis on proximity to transit and opportunity, outcomes that are much richer than brick-and-mortar development. The foundation is also making a major investment in green affordable housing. “We have a focus on quality design, both for health and for efficiency,” Bartholomay explains.

Strengthening Philanthropic Institutions

Recognizing the reality that most land-use decisions are made at the local level, the second area of emphasis

has been strengthening philanthropic institutions, particularly community foundations and other local/regional funders. By playing a hands-on role, the Funders' Network helps give local funders the tools and knowledge they need to make sound investments—and to become leaders on growth and development issues. “If you are going to affect planning, it comes down to local municipalities and what they do,” says John Mitterholzer of The George Gund Foundation, a regional funder. “Federal and state policy is critical, but the implementation is always local. That’s the value of this network—they understand that.”

In 2001, the Network launched the Community Foundation Leadership Project, which sought to ensure that place-based funders have the information, resources, and connections they need to positively influence growth and development issues. “The Funders' Network has played a pivotal role in the development of community foundation leadership around growth

and development issues,” says Pat Jenny, program director for Community Development and the Environment at the New York Community Trust (NYCT). “We [NYCT] have a mission of developing the community foundation field, so I was thrilled when I heard about the Community Foundation Leadership Project [CFLP].” In addition to supporting the CFLP, the Trust has been a stalwart investor in the River Partnership of Community Foundations and a beneficiary of the Network’s support for the One Region Funders’ Group, which the Trust founded. In 2008, the Network folded CFLP activities into its broader programs and expanded its support for geographic and issue-based partnerships that had taken root: the One Region Funders’ Group (see page 38), the Great Communities Collaborative (see page 40), and the River Partnership of Community Foundations.

Of these three partnerships, the River Partnership of Community Foundations

is but one example of how the Network helps strengthen institutions. In 2005, the Funders’ Network convened an exploratory conversation among community foundations located throughout the 10-state Mississippi River Corridor region—from Minnesota to Louisiana—to discuss the possibility of creating a partnership that would help preserve, protect, and restore the treasured rivers of the region. This conversation resulted in the River Partnership of Community Foundations, a collaboration of 18 community foundations—all located along the Mississippi or its tributaries—who share an interest in how these rivers contribute to the economic, cultural, and environmental vitality of their communities.

With the support of the Funders’ Network’s, the River Partnership has emerged as a vital network of community-based institutions that



are committed to protecting and preserving this national treasure and to bolstering their individual and collective leadership capacity. Members meet biannually to discuss common issues, share grantmaking strategies, and strengthen relationships among partner foundations. Through the Partnership, participating foundations also have access to a modest amount of seed money to support and advance local work. In St. Cloud, Minn., for instance, the Central Minnesota Community Foundation helped organize a community planning process that helped residents maximize the economic impact of over \$700 million in river-related investments, while simultaneously strengthening the foundation's reputation for strong leadership.

Others have used tools and strategies gleaned from the River Partnership to garner new donors. In Moline, Ill., The Moline Foundation reached out to new donors to help preserve a riverside park that was first damaged by floods and then threatened with commercial

development. And all participants have discovered new ways to frame their river-related work for external stakeholders and other constituents. In Hernando, Miss., for example, the Community Foundation of Northwest Mississippi used its convening and leadership skills to shape the trajectory of a greenways development plan in DeSoto County.

Fostering Philanthropic Collaboration

The Network's efforts to strengthen institutions overlaps significantly with a third area of emphasis: fostering philanthropic collaboration. For the most part, funder collaboration falls into one of two areas: **issue-based collaboration** or **place-based collaboration**. To date, **issue-based collaboration** has emerged from working groups or in response to key policy concerns. In most cases, issue-based collaboration focuses on facilitating shared learning, developing best practices, and developing a shared

policy agenda—but there is little collaborative funding. By contrast, **place-based collaboratives** tend to emerge in response to a set of opportunities or challenges facing a particular region. In many cases, these collaborations—like the One Region Initiative and the Great Communities Collaborative—involve pooled funding among participants.

The Funders' Network is currently engaged in encouraging or supporting place-based collaborations in the Twin Cities, Chicago, Ohio, Pennsylvania, New Jersey, Massachusetts, California, Florida, New England, and Greater Washington, D.C. Incipient partnerships are also underway in the Intermountain West, the Pacific Northwest, and the Chesapeake Bay Watershed. Through analysis of the field and regions, funder mapping, and development of selection criteria and evaluation frameworks, the Funders' Network provides resources and content for organizations in both philanthropic and smart growth practitioner fields,

helping them to effectively articulate an inclusive, effective, and consistent set of messages regarding growth and development.

“They have been there for any organization that wants to engage in a dialogue around land-use issues,” says Earl Johnson, formerly of The California Endowment, who invited Ben Starrett, the Network’s executive director, to facilitate a series of grantee forums with California nonprofit groups. “My groups are all practitioners and community groups, and Ben was able to translate smart growth ideas and contextualize them for specific communities,” Johnson continues. “I was interested in connecting my grantees to other funders, and Ben helped facilitate those connections.”

With the Network’s support, Johnson’s grantees have been able to place equitable growth and development on the policy agenda in their respective communities. “By giving their reports and insights to my grantees, these guys

were able to muster conversations with local politicians,” Johnson explains. “In Fresno, equitable growth became a central part of the mayoral race. In L.A., they were able to think about creating green schools. And everyone recognizes that green-collar jobs have the potential to increase equity and benefit the environment. They want to be part of the second greening of America.”



Impact Story

Maximizing Community Benefits

Central Corridor Funders Collaborative and Learning Network—Twin Cities

A few years ago, the Metropolitan Council of the Twin Cities announced plans for a light-rail transit line to connect the Minneapolis and St. Paul downtowns. On the surface, the 11-mile Central Corridor line is an ideal smart growth investment. It has the potential to reduce traffic congestion, improve air quality, make neighborhoods more walkable, and create jobs and economic development for the neighborhoods along the line. Yet, it also has the potential to exacerbate gentrification, or, depending on the placement of stations, do little to improve access to public transportation for low-income residents.

In 2007, recognizing both the promise and the potential perils of the Central Corridor project, the Funders' Network helped funders in the Twin Cities create the Central Corridor Funders Collaborative and Learning Network, a partnership of 11 funders that are working to maximize community benefits. For the start-up phase, Anne McEnany, a former Funders' Network consultant, functioned as the Collaborative's de facto staff person, working with members to initiate their work together, connect them with outside resources, and support the hiring process for a full-time staff person. When the Collaborative hired a permanent coordinator, McEnany moved into a more conventional consulting role.

"Funders' Network members, particularly The McKnight Foundation, The Saint Paul Foundation, and the John S. and James L. Knight Foundation, were the driving force and inspiration for the members of the collaborative," says Jonathan Sage-Martinson, the Collaborative's new coordinator. "The conversation started around the fact that this is a huge change for our

communities, but we didn't know that we had the information we needed to get ahead of the curve. The Funders' Network provided the staffing and the organizational glue to help our members think through what they wanted to do."

In its consulting role, the Funders' Network was able to share insights from similar work elsewhere around the country and to connect the members with other funders. "Anne has been key in helping provide continuity as we have gone through the transition with me coming on staff and ramping up activity," Sage-Martinson says. "She's been working before, during, and after my hiring, and has helped provide continuity and outside wisdom."

The project is scheduled to break ground in 2010, but Collaborative members have already started laying the groundwork to ensure that the planning and execution of the project is inclusive and beneficial to all members of the community. Collaborative members have raised a \$5 million Catalyst Fund, which will identify and fill gaps in existing efforts and catalyze new initiatives to more effectively develop stable, healthy, walkable, and diverse neighborhoods near the Central Corridor.

With the combination of a strong learning agenda and seed money to support new ideas, the Collaborative is poised to become a model for inclusive, equitable transit-oriented development planning. Says Sage-Martinson, "Our goal is to help other actors in the corridor have access to good information so they can make good decisions."



Member Profile

Building Transportation Alternatives

One Region Funders' Group—New York, New Jersey, and Connecticut

When the New York Community Trust (NYCT) wanted to develop a regional funders collaborative, it turned to the Funders' Network to help identify potential issues and convene funders and nonprofits. In 2004, the Trust, along with 10 foundation partners from New York, New Jersey, and Connecticut, launched the One Region Funders' Group, a partnership to advance and support transportation planning and reform in the tri-state region. Since then, One Region has catalyzed transportation as a key issue for funders and helped underwrite significant policy reforms to public transportation throughout the region.

Seeking a Regional Partnership

In the winter of 2004, the New York Community Trust convened a small group of civic, environmental, and philanthropic leaders to discuss ways to promote better land use in the New York/New Jersey/Connecticut region. “We weren’t even sure what issue we should focus on, much less how we should structure a funder partnership,” says Pat Jenny, NYCT’s program director for Community Development and the Environment. Jenny and her colleagues at NYCT’s affiliate foundations in Westchester and Long Island brought in the Funders’ Network to convene regional environmental, housing, and community development nonprofits to help identify priority issues throughout the region. Jenny commissioned the Funders’ Network to conduct a scan of growth and development funders throughout the region.

A series of discussions between the funders and nonprofit leaders led to the identification of six potential issues—including the environment,

public infrastructure, and housing—by May 2004. After some discussion, the funders realized that transportation was the key issue. “We realized that, of all these potential issues, transportation was the one issue that linked us all together,” Jenny recalls.

Developing a Collaborative Fund

In early 2005, the funders launched the One Region Funders’ Group to advance transportation planning and reform throughout New York, New Jersey, and Connecticut. The One Region partners set up a collaborative grantmaking fund at the New York Community Trust early in 2006. Over the next few months, the Funders’ Network helped organize funder briefings with regional associations of grantmakers in all three states and has since provided ongoing staff support.

The members of One Region have supported an array of planning and advocacy work through the pooled grantmaking fund. Specifically, the group has supported the Regional Plan Association’s research and advocacy for public investments in mass transit. In 2008, One Region teamed up with the Tri-State Transportation Campaign to create a grants program to support transit-centered development at the local level. “Transit-centered development is a hot issue in the region,” Jenny says, noting that the Tri-State Transportation Campaign received 42 letters of inquiry for the \$150,000 grant pool.

Transforming Member Institutions

But the partnership has also changed how member institutions approach their work. As a member of the One Region Funders' Group, for instance, the Fairfield County Community Foundation began taking a closer look at transportation issues in southwest Connecticut. Although the foundation's main programmatic work clustered around education, economic opportunity, and health and human services, the foundation saw an opportunity to develop a strategy that integrated jobs, transportation, housing, and the environment. "Our involvement with One Region has helped us look at issues in a more holistic way," says Program Director Yolanda Caldera-Durant. "We can look at transportation as a workforce and environmental issue, but it also spills into human services and economic security. The ability to get to and from work is a basic need."

In late 2006, the foundation and One Region co-sponsored a funder briefing that highlighted the need for better transportation options in Fairfield County and across the state. Working with the Emily Hall Tremaine Foundation and One Region staff, through One Region the community foundation helped underwrite a statewide study of bus transit needs. "The idea was to look at what existed and how the state could make it more responsive to people who depend on bus transit, to expand it to choice users—people who have a car but would leave it at home if buses were more user-friendly," Caldera-Durant says.

The study was completed in just four months. "That speaks to how quickly philanthropy can respond," Caldera-Durant says. With One

Region's support, the nonprofit Transit for Connecticut, which is under the Connecticut Fund for the Environment, built a coalition to promote the study and make the case to the state legislature for increased public investments in bus transit. In the fall of 2007, the legislature approved \$10 million in new operating funds for bus transit, and \$20 million in capital investments, including \$5 million for retrofitting buses with clean diesel technology.

"Were it not for One Region, transportation would not have been on our radar screen," Caldera-Durant says. "We don't have an unlimited pool of grant money, but the fact that we can leverage our funds with national and regional funders makes us feel like we are having a real impact."

Member Profile

Fostering Collaboration to Implement Transit-Oriented Development Strategies ***Great Communities Collaborative—Bay Area, Calif.***

Over the next 25 years, the population of the San Francisco Bay Area is projected to increase by 25 percent, 1.7 million people. For the past 50 years, growth patterns were fairly typical: low-density tract homes with strip commercial development along major traffic arteries. As a result, the Bay Area now has the second-worst traffic congestion in the country. Some of California's best farmland has been paved over as jobs, services, and transportation options receded from the region's underserved urban communities. In 2006, a group of Bay Area foundations and nonprofit partners launched the Great Communities Collaborative, a regional partnership aimed ensuring that a new generation of transit-oriented development that is now underway is both sustainable and equitable. The goal? To change the trajectory of growth in the Bay Area by having 50 percent of new homes built by 2030 in walkable communities, at prices affordable to people of all incomes, near transit, services and jobs, and with access to recreation and open space.

Laying a Foundation for Collaboration

Despite best intentions, collaboration can be difficult. In 2000, the East Bay Community Foundation (EBCF) created its Livable Communities Initiative (LCI), which focused on fostering greater social equity, environmental sustainability, and economic vitality in the East Bay region of the San Francisco Bay Area. The foundation helped catalyze a number of innovative community development and transit-oriented development (TOD) projects, helping to build the capacity of nonprofits to work on these issues and providing technical assistance to a range of actors. But, given the scope of the challenges in implementing TOD and smart growth at the scale

that is needed in the nine-county Bay Area, there were limits to what one foundation could accomplish on its own.

In 2004, Allison Brooks, EBCF's Livable Communities program director at the time, approached the Funders' Network to help put together a partnership of community foundations in the Bay Area to work on transit-oriented development and regional equity. "We had been working with the Greenbelt Alliance"—an advocacy group dedicated to preservation of greenspace in the Bay Area—"for some time, and we saw an opportunity to join forces." With the Network's help, Brooks and her colleagues initially reached out to the San Francisco, Marin, and Silicon Valley community foundations on the funder side to discuss opportunities for working collaboratively together to more comprehensively support smart growth efforts across the Bay Area. Eventually, the East Bay Community Foundation and The San Francisco Foundation joined forces and formed an intentional partnership and then saw an opportunity to work closely with a set of four regional and one national nonprofit organizations who were also beginning to scale-up their activities in the TOD and smart growth arena, including the Nonprofit Housing Association of Northern California, TransForm, Urban Habitat, Greenbelt Alliance, and Reconnecting America. Collectively, these funders and nonprofits saw the need to work collaboratively together and form a new and innovative model to support catalytic change in the region that is equitable and sustainable.

Wrangling the community foundations into a highly coordinated partnership took longer than anticipated. "It took us two years to work through the

logistics of a partnership and to build buy-in among the various boards,” Brooks says. Throughout the process, the Funders’ Network played a critical role, conducting a field scan of smart growth activities in the Bay Area and working with the foundation boards get comfortable with the idea of collaborating.

The San Francisco Foundation, East Bay Community Foundation, and the five nonprofit partners worked together for over a year to establish the infrastructure for the Collaborative. “Having put in the time to work through those relationships really paid off,” Brooks says. “We’re just going like gangbusters. There is a level of trust that’s been created. Whether we’re dealing with public agencies or transit authorities, we have demonstrated that we are value added.” Over time, the Silicon Valley Community Foundation also became a formal partner.

Planning for Equitable Transit-Oriented Development

The Great Communities Collaborative was created, in part, to capitalize on the convergence of demographic, economic, and policy trends. First, demographics: The sheer scale of the region’s projected growth is projected to create demand for over a half-million homes near transit by 2030. Second, policy: New legislation aimed at reducing the state’s carbon emissions is forcing planning agencies to reduce vehicle miles traveled, while state infrastructure bonds provide incentives for land use and transportation planning. Finally, economics: Since 2000, Bay Area voters have approved \$12 billion for public transport service, an investment that will add 100 new rapid transit stations

to the existing network of 305 stations. Meanwhile, the Metropolitan Transportation Commission is investing \$60 million (up from the original \$27 million) to support plans for livable communities, which include housing, commercial, and public uses near new stations.

The challenge was to ensure that low-income communities and communities of color benefitted equally from the region’s newfound passion for transit-oriented development. “On one hand, this was an unprecedented opportunity, but municipal policies and planning conventions often leave out valuable perspectives and potential in the communities that are most vulnerable to displacement,” says Heather Hood, environment program coordinator at The San Francisco Foundation. “Without adequate community involvement that can give voice to and advance community needs, as well as create proponents of development plans, citizen backlash often thwarts the progress of generally good projects.”

Organizing for Equitable Development

Thanks to the members of the Great Communities Collaborative, however, communities’ authentic voices are being included in the planning process. Working through community partners, the Collaborative’s nonprofit members have coordinated planning efforts at 25 of the 75 sites where regionally sponsored and city-led transit planning is underway. “Our engagement at these sites takes place from the very beginning of the planning process, to maximize the effectiveness of the community based engagement,” Hood says. “We use a range of strategies, including extensive community outreach, education, site analysis, and media

activism to engage residents—particularly underserved residents—in the process.” The Collaborative has documented much of its work and placed these resources—the Great Communities Toolkit, a Mixed-Income TOD Action Guide, and the early framework for a regional TOD land acquisition fund—on the GCC website, where they are available to activists from around the country.

The Collaborative has already achieved some impressive results. Recognizing the quality of the first round of station plans submitted with the help of the Collaborative, the Metropolitan Transportation Commission recently decided to increase its annual funding for TOD planning from \$27 million to \$60 million. Just as important, MTC staff and representatives of the Association of Bay Area Governments are now actively coordinating with the Collaborative’s staff, core and local partners. “This kind of coordination between advocates and regional agencies is rare in the field,” Hood notes.

Through community organizing and education in priority sites, the Collaborative has engaged hundreds of residents in planning processes. And that organizing, Hood says, has fundamentally shifted the debate. “As a direct result of the strong organizing, analysis, and advocacy done by core, affiliate, and community-based partners, issues such as affordable housing, local hiring strategies, green building standards, pedestrian and bicycle-friendly urban design, and community-serving facilities (such as job training centers, grocery stores and health clinics) are now at the top of the list of needs to be included in many of our 10 priority TOD plans.”



Conclusion

Perhaps it is the turmoil and uncertainty wrought by this moment in history, but a sense of imminent reckoning looms in the public imagination. The housing market has collapsed. Credit is still tight. Unemployment is rising. The nation is embroiled in two wars. The atmosphere grows warmer day by day. And gasoline at four dollars a gallon is a very fresh memory—and a reality that may not be far away again.

And yet there is also reason for hope, even optimism. President Obama has made it clear that one of his top priorities will be shifting America towards a green energy economy. If that shift is going to happen, growth and development issues will have to become more sustainable and equitable. As a former community organizer and an advocate of transparent government, President Obama is sending the right signals, indicating that he intends to

ensure that American society and the economy that supports it become more equitable, inclusive, and accessible to all.

What does this mean for the future of sustainable growth and development? For many long-time members of the Funders' Network, this is a moment of opportunity. "I think it's fair to say that, across the United States, you have many more people who understand why this is important," says Hooper Brooks, a founding board member of the Funders' Network and director of International Programmes for the Prince's Foundation for the Built Environment. "Elected officials, they get the idea of sustainable growth. They get the mistakes of the 1960s. They see sprawl and they say, 'My God, how did we do that?' The conversation is engaged now." Brooks notes that a shift has occurred among the nonprofit community as well. Ten years ago, he notes, groups that were

focused on land preservation or carbon reduction were just looking at one tool—land acquisition or efficient cars. "But you see shifts now," he continues. "The Nature Conservancy and the Trust for Public Land understand that it's more than just protecting land—it's about the surrounding communities as well."

And what does this mean for the future of the Funders' Network? Over the past decade, the Network has done a lot to put the issue of livable communities on the map. The organization plays a central role in translating issues in a way that helps people see the change on the ground. As an affinity group, the Network has pioneered a model that helps funders come together around solving problems and moving money towards solutions.

“The Funders’ Network has laid a base—and because of that base, there is opportunity to go further,” says Sharon Alpert, program director for environment at the Surdna Foundation, a longtime supporter of the Network. “The question is: How do we retool our economy to support sustainable prosperity? We’re on the cusp of a Green New Deal. It’s about taking a comprehensive look and investing for the long haul. TFN understands that need. There is a real window of opportunity.”



Appendix A: Interviewees

1. **Sharon Alpert**, Surdna Foundation
2. **Carl Anthony**, Ford Foundation (formerly)
3. **Dan Bartholomay**, The McKnight Foundation (formerly)
4. **Dana Bourland**, Enterprise Community Partners
5. **Allison Brooks**, East Bay Community Foundation (formerly)
6. **Hooper Brooks**, Prince's Foundation for the Built Environment
7. **Kim Burnett**, Surdna Foundation
8. **Yolanda Caldera-Durant**, Fairfield County Community Foundation
9. **Cheryl Casciani**, Baltimore Community Foundation
10. **Tony Coombes**, Neptis Foundation
11. **Nancy Fishman**, Grand Victoria Foundation
12. **Marty Fluharty**, Americana Foundation
13. **Gail Imig**, W.K. Kellogg Foundation
14. **Pat Jenny**, New York Community Trust
15. **Jon Jensen**, Park Foundation
16. **Earl Johnson**, The California Endowment (formerly)
17. **Jim Mann**, Illinois Clean Energy Community Foundation
18. **Anne McEnany**, International Community Foundation
19. **John Mitterholzer**, The George Gund Foundation
20. **Kevin Murphy**, Berks County Community Foundation
21. **Kevin Peterson**, New Hampshire Charitable Foundation
22. **Erika Poethig**, The John D. and Catherine T. MacArthur Foundation
23. **Jonathan Sage-Martinson**, Central Corridor Funders Collaborative and Learning Network
24. **Scot Spencer**, Annie E. Casey Foundation
25. **Tene Traylor**, The Community Foundation for Greater Atlanta
26. **Nancy Van Milligen**, Community Foundation of Greater Dubuque
27. **Mauro Vescera**, Vancouver Foundation (formerly)
28. **Bob Wagner**, The Community Foundation of Western North Carolina
29. **Gerry Wang**, William Penn Foundation
30. **Mary Whitney**, Essex County Community Foundation



1500 San Remo Avenue, Suite 249
Coral Gables, FL 33146
(305) 667-6350 phone / (305) 667-6355 fax
www.fundersnetwork.org

