

SEPTEMBER 16, 2010

# CITIZEN- CENTERED SOLUTIONS

LESSONS IN LEVERAGING PUBLIC PARTICIPATION  
FROM THE MAKE IT YOUR OWN AWARDS™



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THE CASE FOUNDATION

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# ABOUT

## THE EVALUATION TEAM



### CYNTHIA M. GIBSON, PH.D.

Cynthia Gibson has more than 25 years of experience in the nonprofit sector as a consultant, senior staff person, and advisor for hundreds of national nonprofits and philanthropic institutions. As principal of Cynthesis Consulting™, she provides a wide range of services—including strategic planning and positioning, program development, evaluation, marketing/communications, and public policy research and analysis—for nonprofits and foundations across the country. In 2007 for the Case Foundation, Gibson authored *Citizens at the Center: A New Approach to Civic Engagement* and helped to develop a new direction for grantmaking reflecting the concepts in this paper—including the importance of public participation in philanthropy—that was highlighted in *The New York Times* and *The Chronicle of Philanthropy*.



### PETER LEVINE, PH.D.

Peter Levine is the Director of CIRCLE, The Center for Information and Research on Civic Learning and Engagement and Research Director of Tufts University's Jonathan Tisch College of Citizenship and Public Service. In addition to having worked with Common Cause and the National Commission on Civic Renewal, Levine has also authored several books, including *The Future of Democracy: Developing the Next Generation of American Citizens* (2007). He has served on the boards or steering committees of AmericaSpeaks, Streetlaw, the Newspaper Association of America Foundation, the Campaign for the Civic Mission of Schools, the Kettering Foundation, the American Bar Association Committee's for Public Education, the Paul J. Aicher Foundation, and the Deliberative Democracy Consortium.

## ABOUT



### PETER DEITZ

Peter Deitz is a blogger, micro-philanthropy consultant, and the founder of Social Actions, a social enterprise that curates open source and collaborative projects. He has presented at several venues, including the Nonprofit Technology Conference, the NetSquared Conference, Connecting Up Australia, Semantic Technology Conference, and My Charity Connects. Peter holds a BA in History from McGill University and an MA in History from the University of Toronto. He lives in Montreal, Quebec. At PeterDeitz.com, Peter shares his thoughts on fundraising, micro-philanthropy, nonprofit technology, and social entrepreneurship; as well as providing micro-philanthropy consulting to organizations, companies, and foundations that seek to use the web to engage more people in making a difference.



### THE CASE FOUNDATION

The Case Foundation, created by Steve and Jean Case in 1997, invests in people and ideas that can change the world. The Foundation champions initiatives that connect people, increase giving, and catalyze civic action. For more information, visit <http://www.casefoundation.org/>.

# LETTER FROM THE EVALUATORS

Citizen-centered approaches have been around a long time, but what haven't been are attempts to determine whether those approaches are effective in advancing civic engagement in ways that embed it as an ethos more deeply in communities. Several factors have made this difficult, including: the complexity of the concept; its emphasis on the process of citizen deliberation as being equally as important as the action those citizens take in implementing their decisions; the organic and iterative nature of these initiatives; and the time it takes to see results. These and other factors associated with citizen-centered efforts are not easily measured, especially as a set of quantitative outputs.

Just because it's challenging, however, doesn't mean that it shouldn't be attempted, which is why we enthusiastically agreed to help the Case Foundation track more rigorously its attempts to "lift up" the citizen-centered approach through its Make It Your Own (MIYO) grant program. We were also very interested in seeing whether and how a foundation could integrate this approach itself in its grantmaking activities toward a goal of advancing the concept more broadly, not only in the civic engagement field but also across the wider philanthropic community. Does public participation in philanthropy matter and, if so, why?

This report attempts to answer those questions through a longitudinal analysis that includes data collected during 2006 to 2010, representing every step in the process and from a variety of participants, including Foundation staff, consultants, external reviewers, applicants, and grant awardees. The evaluation covers both the process the Foundation used and the grantee's progress and results (both one and two years after grants were awarded).

We believe that this is one of the few efforts focused on tracking and analyzing data about a cohort of individuals and organizations engaged in citizen-centered work—all at the same time and with similar baselines and endpoints. When MIYO began, it was also one of the first to assess whether and how philanthropy could or should be "citizen-centered" and its role in supporting this work more broadly. And, it was one of the first to look at the role of technology in citizen-centered work and philanthropic programs aimed at engaging the public in its funding—a practice that appears to be growing.

Since finishing this evaluation, we've been pleased to see a marked uptick in the awareness of citizen-centered approaches to civic engagement, as well as more public discussion about and testing of these approaches in philanthropy. What is now needed is a commitment to ensuring that this work not only continues, but that it is also continually and rigorously assessed so that those committed to civic engagement can have the information they need to do so in the most effective way possible.

We look forward to seeing that happen.

Peter Levine, Ph.D. | Peter Deitz | Cynthia Gibson, Ph.D.

# INTRODUCTION

In 2006, the Case Foundation set out to find an answer to a question critical to its efforts to increase civic engagement in the United States: Had the millions of dollars that had been funneled into service and civic engagement programs in previous years led to those activities and values becoming embedded more deeply into Americans' lives?

Answering that question turned out to be tougher than figuring out how many trees were planted, rivers cleaned up, or people voted. To find the answer, the Foundation talked to people who'd been writing about service and civic engagement, thinking about it, and doing it in real communities. They said yes, there is a deep tradition of service in America. The catch? Many people still felt powerless to address important things affecting their lives—things like what was happening in their schools, decisions about zoning or land use, or tax spending.

**...there was a need for the creation of more civic spaces that would allow diverse groups of people to connect with each other (including those they might disagree with), discuss what matters most, form solutions, and take action together to address them.**

These and many other findings were compiled and published later that year by the Foundation in *Citizens at the Center: A New Approach to Civic Engagement*. Based on numerous interviews with diverse cross-sector groups of practitioners and thought leaders, as well as analysis of field research, the paper suggested that embedding civic engagement more deeply in communities would require going beyond asking people to plug into programs that encouraged them to “do good.” Rather, there was a need for the creation of more civic spaces that would allow diverse groups of people to connect with each other (including those they might disagree with), discuss what matters most, form solutions, and take action together to address them.

This citizen-centered approach was off-the-radar but not a new concept. The Case Foundation simply believed it deserved more attention—and it did get attention. The publication was disseminated and requested in the thousands and prompted numerous discussions at major conferences. It also appeared on a vast array of websites, blogs, and news outlets around the country.

## CITIZEN-CENTERED APPROACHES ARE:

- Focused primarily on **culture change**, rather than short-term outcomes, issues, or victories.
- Representative of a **cross-section** of the entire community, rather than parts of it.
- Concerned with **deliberation** as much as tactics to address issues.
- About giving people the chance to form and promote their **own decisions**, self-govern, and build open civic processes.

## CITIZEN-CENTERED APPROACHES ARE NOT:

- **Structured** or pre-determined programs or campaigns to plug into.
- Focused on providing **training** or education.
- Planned, structured, or driven by outside **experts** or organizations.
- Attempting to inspire, persuade, or **manipulate** people to adopt a particular view or position.

Clearly, people wanted to know more about this “new” approach. But what did it really look like?

To answer that question, the Case Foundation designed the Make It Your Own Awards™ (MIYO). The goal of the new grantmaking initiative was to showcase citizen-centered efforts going on around the country, rendering a nuanced concept into something that people could easily recognize.

In early 2007, the Foundation began designing the program, which it envisioned as occurring almost entirely online and using the most current technological tools available at the time. As it dove into the process, the Foundation realized that as a member of the nonprofit sector and civic engagement movement, it too had a responsibility to walk the talk of what it was advocating. Specifically, it needed to open up the process to real people and invite their participation in a process that was usually left to experts.

**“In a first, a major foundation is offering the public a direct role in deciding who should receive some of its money, a process typically shrouded in mystery.”**

To that end, the Case Foundation designed a grantmaking program that would be almost entirely shaped by people outside its doors—from determining the grant guidelines and judging criteria to reviewing applications and voting on the winners.

This process, which the Foundation coined as “citizen-centered philanthropy,” caught the attention of The New York Times’ philanthropy reporter Stephanie Strom who said, “In a first, a major foundation is offering the public a direct role in deciding who should receive some of its money, a process typically shrouded in mystery.”

Recognizing that citizen-centered processes are not mob rule, but rather, a partnership between experts and the public, the Foundation also invited several leaders in the civic engagement field to work with the public reviewers to help shepherd this new process forward. Together, this unique group with its diverse range of experiences and perspectives reviewed 4,641 applications, winnowing this down to 100 semi-finalists, and ultimately, 20 grant winners who were able to compete for four larger grant awards through a public voting process.

In March 2008, after 15,232 votes were cast, the Case Foundation announced its final four winners, all of whom were committed to making their communities better places to live through citizen-centered engagement. These winners, and all of the Top 20, not only received money, but also, hands-on technical assistance and coaching tools to help them fundraise and publicize their efforts more broadly. They, as well as all those who made the Top 100, also received customized, advanced widgets and web pages on the Case Foundation website to help them with their fundraising and outreach.

From the moment this initiative was launched, the Foundation has collected data about almost every step of it—from asking external reviewers for their opinions to surveying groups of winners to see how they were progressing. In 2009, one year after grant awards, that data was analyzed by a set of outside evaluators to determine whether and to what extent this program had been able to help strengthen and support citizen-centered approaches to civic engagement. The Foundation also checked back two years after the grants were awarded to see what had transpired with grantees.

This report summarizes what the Case Foundation learned as a result of this challenging process, including what worked and what didn't, and whether and how grantees were able to achieve their goals. By presenting this information as openly as possible, the Foundation hopes that it is providing a useful road map to others interested in advancing this work—citizens, funders, educators, businesspeople, legislators, and many others—in communities across the country.

## Definitions

**Applicants:** All 4,641 original applicants for a MIYO award. We consulted their online application materials and the scores they received from peer reviewers.

**Survey respondents:** 477 of the original 4,641 applicants who completed a survey about their experience in the MIYO initiative.

**Top 100:** The 100 MIYO applicants who received the best scores. Generalizations about this group are based on the 29 who completed the survey.

**Winners:** The Top 20 MIYO finalists, including the Final Four.

**Interviewees:** Applicants from the Top 100, community partners from their communities, and Case Foundation program officers who were interviewed by telephone.

**Treatment Group:** The same as “winners.” Generalizations about the treatment group are based on the 10 who completed the survey.

**Comparison Group:** The Top 100 who were not “winners.” Generalizations about this group are based on the 17 who completed the survey.



# EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

## KEY FINDINGS AND LESSONS

Since the Make It Your Own grant period officially ended in 2009, grantees have been working in their communities to implement their projects. But did they finish? And what did they learn? Equally important, what did the Case Foundation learn from this entire process?

To find out, the Foundation commissioned Peter Levine, Ph.D., director of the Center for Civic Learning and Engagement (CIRCLE) at Tufts University, to design and issue an academically rigorous survey and review the data the Foundation had been collecting at every phase of this process. Peter Deitz of Social Actions helped design and conduct the technology component of the evaluation, and Cynthia Gibson, Ph.D., the author of *Citizens at the Center*, weaved it all together and examined how grantees progressed with the approach.

Of specific interest to the Case Foundation was whether the MIYO process, grants, and other benefits to the applicants had positive effects and, especially, had helped to support high-quality citizen-centered work that would not have occurred without the MIYO initiative. The data collected in this evaluation has also had the additional benefit of providing an unprecedented picture of citizen-centered efforts occurring in America—information that had previously been difficult to obtain and that will be of considerable use to the field.

## METHODOLOGY

Data for the evaluation include all 4,641 original applications; peer reviewers' ratings of those applications; surveys (including both short-answer and open-ended questions) completed by approximately 477 of the applicants; observations at an in-person grantees meeting in Baltimore, MD; reports by grantees; and interviews of selected applicants and grantees and their community partners. These various forms of evidence were combined into one rich dataset so that investigators could determine relationships among different variables.

## KEY FINDINGS

### The Make It Your Own Grants

- **Two years after the grants were awarded, 80 percent of grantees were still highly engaged with their projects and said that they planned to continue to build on them,** indicating that the MIYO was able to provide a solid foundation for this work.

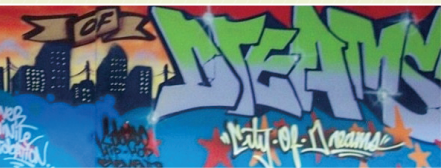
■ **More than half the MIYO grantees had achieved concrete and significant outcomes at the two-year mark, among them:**



- | Replication of the citizen-centered model used in Dunn County, Wisconsin in other communities across the country and Canada (**Dunn County Community Visioning**).
- | Passage of a charter amendment mandating a citizen participation initiative in New Orleans and that the city may subsidize; there will also be a chapter on citizen participation included in the master plan for the city (**Citizen Participation**).
- | Public recognition and “100 percent support” from the police department in one New York City community for a project to convene police officers and community citizens; it started slowly but now, some of the project’s most committed participants are NYPD officers (**Conversations for Change**).
- | Statewide participation in an online community-building project in Vermont, which now has 20,000 users and more than 100,000 postings—accomplishments that were recently featured in Yankee magazine (**Front Porch Forum**).
- | Presentations to Philadelphia’s Department of Health and Human Services about the approach being used by a youth-led initiative that works with young people in the juvenile justice system to reintegrate into their communities. It has also just created a similar effort focused on young people in the foster care system (**Juveniles 4 Justice**).
- | The creation of four committees—one of which is now part of local government—and requests to partner with other community organizations in convening residents to identify and take action in addressing environmental problems in several Florida neighborhoods. Recently, Good Magazine and a local college of art and design partnered with one committee to run a campaign to encourage students to design new solutions to the community’s water problems (**Summit for Environmental Action**).
- | Expansion of an effort to recruit young people from Chicago’s southwest side to address community issues using social media and hip hop music. In its first year, the effort reached 400 community residents who took part in the project’s activities. The first class of young leaders also agreed to assume leadership in raising funds needed to financially sustain the project (**Leaders of the New School**).
- | Raising money for and building a community pavilion and holding public conversations that led to the establishment of a new organization to “boost up the scale” of green activities in nine towns in Massachusetts. That network persuaded seven town governments in the region to join together to be certified by the State of Massachusetts as a “green community”—a designation that allows the community to compete for a portion of a pool of state money for renewable energy projects (**Hands Across North Quabbin**).
- | In northwest Washington, hundreds of residents, health and community group leaders, government officials, and businesses held several convenings that led to the creation of an action plan addressing a health issue citizens identified as important: improving supports and service provision for children and youth with special health care needs [CYSHCN]. This has led to a new organization—Taking Action for CYSHCN—which now has four action groups, a development team, and a coordinating council that continue to use the citizen-centered approach in all its efforts (**Making Health Our Own**).
- | While the stories that stem from the Make It Your Own projects are inspirational, so are the numbers. From the Top 20 projects...
  - > More than **800 community meetings** were held with over **5,500 participants**.
  - > More than **1,500 action projects** took place with more than **3,300 participants**.
  - > Nearly **20,000 individuals** were engaged in some aspect of the projects.
  - > Over **600 collaborative partners** were involved.



- Within two years of grant awards, **three projects had ended or been forced to close**, due largely to the inability of the original leaders to continue serving in that capacity. Also, the Foundation was unable to locate one of the Top 20 projects.
- **Other challenges faced by MIYO grantees** at the end of two years were county and local budget cuts (which grantees also viewed as opportunities to spur support for their efforts in the community); keeping people interested in the projects; language barriers; and funding (although this was not one that precluded them from moving forward).
- **At the end of the one-year grant period, 13 out of 20 grantees (65%) considered themselves at an “advanced” level of citizen-centered work**, compared to 11 grantees (or 55%) at the interim stage.
- **The grant award enabled winners to conduct public meetings which otherwise may have not occurred.** Winning a MIYO award allowed organizations to conduct public meetings that would otherwise have been too expensive or difficult. These meetings attracted diverse groups of people in communities where having opportunities to connect with fellow residents were relatively rare. Most grantees indicated that the meetings were quite productive, suggesting they have the potential to serve as a foundation for ongoing work in these communities after the grant period ends.
- **People who participated in MIYO projects believed this participation would increase their civic engagement in the future.** MIYO winners were more likely to report that the people they had recruited to participate in their community-based projects said this participation had increased their interest in “doing more” for their communities, now and in the future.
- **Even though only 20 projects received funding, a majority of the 4,641 MIYO applicants moved their projects forward.** Of those, 28 percent started what was proposed, eight (8) percent completed what was proposed, and 19 percent went beyond what was proposed. Only 18 percent of all applicants reported that they hadn’t done anything.
- **Applicants generally liked the grant process, especially learning about the concept and having the chance to describe what they planned to do in that area.** Among applicants, the highest-rated aspects of the grant program were learning more about the citizen-centered engagement approach and being given the opportunity to flesh out their projects in more detail via the online application form. Nearly half the applicants (46%) said that what they’d heard and learned about the citizen-centered process was very helpful to the work they did or are doing on their projects. For some of these applicants, the concept was completely new; for others, it “filled gaps” in their knowledge and was “exciting because it completely fits” with what they were already doing.
- **The overall applicant pool was not especially strong in terms of its reflection of “citizen-centered” efforts as defined by *Citizens at the Center*.** Despite the Foundation’s efforts to include definitions of this concept in all its materials—including grant guidelines, website announcements, and the applications themselves—applicants tended to interpret the phrase as synonymous with community service, volunteering, and/or “effective or fair delivery of services to citizens,” rather than with community problem-solving that involves citizens.



- **The MIYO winners, however, did reflect the citizen-centered concept**, suggesting that using a combination of both experts and external reviewers at the final stages of the effort to score and assess proposals was effective in surfacing projects that best illustrated the concept.

### The Make It Your Own Citizen-Centered Philanthropy Process

- The public voting process was the least popular aspect of the process. Many applicants felt it was “unfair” and/or “overly time consuming.” Some applicants felt it was biased in favor of projects in large cities or was a “popularity contest” for “projects that were able to mobilize supporters to vote for them.”
- Still, respondents believed the public voting helped expose voters to the concept and practice of citizen-centered approaches, due to the Foundation’s extensive efforts to publicize the initiative. During the voting portion of the process, the Foundation’s website received approximately 45,000 unique visits to the online ballot, with more than 60,000 votes cast by 15,232 individuals (each individual was required to vote for four projects).
- MIYO winners embodied the citizen-centered approach that the Foundation stipulated at the beginning of this process. While this may seem obvious, it wasn’t necessarily a result that was anticipated at the onset of the process, given the nuances of the citizen-centered concept, the difficulty many applicants had with understanding it, the use of nearly 100 external reviewers who were not professional grantmakers; and the Foundation’s decision to “let go” of most control in these decisions. The result, however, underscores how criteria and guidelines developed by people outside a Foundation can be as strategic and rigorous as those created by people associated with administering the program.

### The Technology and Tools

- Applicants welcomed the opportunity to learn about and experiment with online tools the Foundation offered such as the fundraising widgets, but didn’t experience immediate success with them. **Only 33 of the Top 100 finalists received a donation through their respective widget** in addition to the \$100 that the Foundation provided to jump start their online fundraising effort. The most successful finalist used their widget to raise a total of \$1,219 from 23 donors—well below the \$10,000 that each of the Top 20 projects received from the Foundation.
- **Grantees did not feel that the various opportunities provided to them by the Foundation, including widgets and social media trainings, were really optional.** As one grantee noted, s/he felt that they had to post a video once that opportunity was offered. This was largely due to grantees’ fears of disappointing funders because “they are gods,” as one said.
- **Still, 35 percent of the MIYO winners and 20 percent of the non-winners said the fundraising widget and other online tools were somewhat or very helpful in ways other than raising funds.** Although the Case Foundation did not provide online tools for project management (e.g., recruiting volunteers, discussions, etc.), many MIYO applicants used the online tools for these tasks and/or sought them out, suggesting their exposure to these then-new concepts were helpful in encouraging deeper experimentation with other online resources, particularly among winners.



- **Survey respondents and interviewees said “not having enough time” was the primary reason they didn’t make more use of the technology tools.** Respondents were almost unanimous in viewing technology as more, not less, time-consuming.
- **Email and simple web pages were still the most effective and used methods for applicants and winners to engage with their supporters.** Many applicants continued to rely on more traditional forms of technology-driven outreach such as websites and emails as the primary ways in which they communicated with participants in their projects.
- **Since the grant period ended, the majority of MIYO grantees continue to use the Internet to advance their projects.** Although this use still consists largely of emails and web pages as indicated above, nearly three-quarters of survey respondents indicated they had used technology to communicate with their supporters since the MIYO Awards.

## THE LESSONS

### **The citizen-centered concept is difficult to explain, even with “real life” examples.**

This suggests the need for more marketing and communications strategies that are sharper and more resonant not only with those already working in this area, but also with a broader public.

**It takes money to help organize and hold public meetings,** which are at the core of community-based citizen-centered work ...

**... but it doesn’t take a lot of money.** The MIYO grant awards were relatively small, which allowed grantees to hold at least one public meeting that helped lay a foundation for future efforts. With several of these kinds of small grants sustained over a longer time period, it’s highly likely that this work could gain the traction it needs to become embedded in communities.

### **Small grants can also help lay a foundation for sustained work in communities.**

An analysis of MIYO winners’ progress one year after the grant period ended found that 80 percent of them had not only continued their efforts, but had taken steps to build on them by acquiring additional funding or partners and/or replicating their efforts in other communities.

**The online tools the Foundation provided didn’t help grantees as much as it anticipated.** Most of the grantees didn’t use the technology tools provided by the Foundation. Although grantees were interested in the widgets, for example, they found them almost completely unsuccessful in helping to raise money for their projects.

**Online tools (including widgets) and technology overall need to be developed carefully and with an eye toward grantees’ capacity for understanding and using them.** Results indicate that despite the numerous training opportunities and help resources provided, without adequate incentives, and time to absorb these new skills, most people will tend to rely on what they know—in this case, emails and websites.



**The technology-related results should be considered in context.** The MIYO process occurred at a time when social networking was still relatively nascent. If the MIYO process were launched today—when social networks have become more essential to individuals and organizations—these results would probably be different, given that applicants would be more likely to have networks in place and “ready to respond” when they posted a widget or fundraising appeal.

**The process needs to be simplified.** The MIYO process was extremely complex with several steps, trainings, protocols, and requirements, all in a very short timeframe. This left many applicants feeling overburdened and at times frustrated.

**Online voting should be fair and simple.** Voters should be required to pick more than one winner, and incentives need to be provided to encourage voters to think more about all the projects, rather than to play favorites. It also helps to randomize the order in which candidates appear on the lists, as well as to use the same tone and amount of space to showcase them. Overall, the fewer clicks, the better.

**The process must include both real people and experts.** While external reviewers and public voters were instrumental to this process, so were the leaders and experts the Foundation used to help decide on the Top 20 (from the Top 100 that was selected by external reviewers) that would be put forward for the final vote. Their insights, experience, and knowledge were essential to bring rigor and depth to the process, as well as shape it in ways that would help the overall field.

**Participatory philanthropy has gained traction.** Although the Case Foundation can’t take credit for inventing this concept, there are clear indicators that the efforts it undertook to design and publicize the MIYO program, the publication of *Citizens at the Center*, and the online voting process helped push it forward within the larger philanthropic community. Since 2006 when the Foundation began work on this issue, the number of philanthropic institutions, corporations, community groups, and other organizations using an online, participatory approach to philanthropy.

**There are marked differences, however, in how institutions employ participatory philanthropy.** Some institutions prepare a slate of candidates and ask the public to vote on who should win. Others involve the grant-seeking public in preparing that slate and even the criteria on which applicants should be assessed. Still others retain the right to decide which groups, if any, should be disqualified. That has led to discussions about what, exactly, participatory philanthropy means and how/when it can be used most effectively in meeting funding goals.

# ABOUT THE PROCESS

## MAKE IT YOUR OWN PROGRAM GOALS

### The program had five goals:

- To support and “lift up” citizen-centered work in communities across the country.
- To raise awareness of multiple pathways to active engagement and reach new and diverse audiences.
- To empower people with tools to help them take action into their own hands—widgets, web pages, personal blogs, etc.
- To collect and disseminate compelling stories about new ways people are breaking down barriers to participation and taking back their communities.
- To test a “citizen-centered” approach to philanthropy that would involve real people in every step of the grantmaking process, from input on guidelines and applicant review to deciding on finalists and winners. It would also reflect the Foundation’s commitment to “walking the talk” of citizen participation outlined in *Citizens at the Center*.

### The Process: Components



1  
Individuals Submit  
Short Applications  
Online



2  
External Reviewers  
Score Applications  
Online



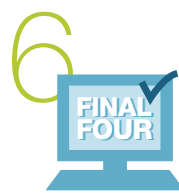
3  
100 Individuals  
Invited to Submit  
Full Proposals



4  
Expert Judges  
Select Top 20  
\$10K Winners



5  
Vetting by the  
Case Foundation



6  
Online Community  
Votes for Final Four  
\$25K Winners



7  
Winners, Compelling  
Stories, Stronger  
Communities

## The MIYO grantmaking process involved several steps:

### ■ Developing guidelines.

In conjunction with partner organizations, Case Foundation staff convened meetings in Boston, Minneapolis, and Washington, D.C. to vet draft program guidelines with a diverse group of scholars and practitioners in the civic engagement field. Many of the suggestions raised were incorporated into the final guidelines.

### ■ Online applications.

The Case Foundation developed a five-question, online application that was available to any and all individuals who wanted to apply. This process allowed the Foundation to incorporate the best of traditional grantmaking, which often uses a letter of intent or proposal to determine funding potential, with new approaches and tools that capitalized on technology's efficiency, reach, and marketing/fundraising capacities.

Working with numerous nonprofit partner organizations and using a comprehensive marketing strategy, the Foundation publicized the program and encouraged applications via numerous venues to ensure broad and diverse representation. Nearly 5,000 people filled out the online application, all of whom received a personalized web page and a widget from the Foundation to help them develop and publicize their idea/project with a wider audience. The demographics of these applicants as well as other personal data were collected.

The Foundation also provided several "information sessions"—webinars that provided opportunities for potential applicants to learn more about the process prior to submitting an application to the program. These sessions, held for constituents of partner organizations as well as members of the general public, provided information about the citizen-centered concept, guidelines, and program structure.

## All Applicants: The Numbers

4,641 people applied

58%  
white

23%  
African American

5%  
Hispanic/Latino

2%  
Asian

69%  
female

31%  
male

Applications came from all 50 states



38%

25 to 44-year-olds

10%

14 to 24-year-olds

25%

Over 55-year-olds

The top five states submitting applications included:

California (9.9%), New York (6.9%), Florida (6.0%), Pennsylvania (4.2%), and Texas (4.1%).

The top five cities submitting applications included (in order):

Philadelphia, New York City, Chicago, Los Angeles, and Atlanta.

There was near-equal representation from the four regions of the nation:

Northeast (20.7%), Midwest (23.2%), South (34.2%), and West (22%).

More than one-half of those surveyed said they had never completed an online grant application before. This is of particular note considering one-quarter of all the applicants were over the age of 55.

#### ■ External reviewers.

The Case Foundation prepared a “job description” to encourage practitioners and ordinary people to apply as citizen reviewers for the applications. This description was disseminated, far and wide, resulting in the Foundation receiving approximately 200 résumés. Foundation staff reviewed these and selected 30 reviewers initially. When it was discovered that the number of applications received totaled nearly 5,000, Foundation staff recruited an additional 63 reviewers using all the alternates and also reached out to practitioners/scholars with whom it had a relationship and who were in the field. The total number of external reviewers then increased to 93.

#### ■ External reviewer process.

Foundation staff required that all external reviewers participate in an online training it prepared. An important part of that training was reviewing and understanding a detailed scoring rubric that attempted to break down and codify each section of the application. Using this rubric, reviewers rated each assigned application using an online scoring template. Two reviewers assessed each application. If there was a major discrepancy between the two scores, a third reviewer was asked to score the application as well.



### ■ Getting to the Top 100 with external reviewers.

Case Foundation staff compiled a list of the Top 100 applicants, based on the combined scores of its external reviewers who were charged with this part of the process. A small committee comprising Foundation staff and consultants reviewed this list with an eye toward ensuring representative geographic, racial/ethnic, and age/gender diversity.

While reviewing this list, it was discovered that some of the projects that had initially received lower marks by the first two reviewers had risen on the list—and vice versa with those that had scored higher (and had now dropped). The reason: the introduction of a third reviewer changed the “average” of the first two reviewers’ scores (for example, a project that had received a “50” and a “210” from the first two reviewers may have then received a “200” from the third, changing the average).

To remedy this, staff went through applications that had a third score and re-averaged them. Specifically, if a project received, out of the three scores, two higher marks, staff averaged only those. And if a project received, out of the three scores, two lower marks, staff averaged only those. That led to a slight shifting of the top scores. Once that list had been compiled, staff then re-reviewed it to ensure representative diversity.

An important lesson this evaluation was that if this process is undertaken again, four reviewers should be assigned to each proposal, with the two middle scores averaged and the high and low scores thrown out.

The Foundation also disqualified about 40 applicants that did not submit complete applications or meet basic eligibility criteria, which included residing in and submitting a project focused on one of the 50 states, D.C. or Puerto Rico, and being 14 years of age or older.

Once the final list had been stipulated, the Foundation undertook background checks of these applicants and their nonprofit partners to ensure that they were in compliance with the law and in a financial position to accept and manage the grant.

### ■ Top 100 applications.

The Top 100 were invited to submit full proposals (also completed online). Scoring rubrics were also created to help operationalize the sections of the proposal. Ninety-six of the top 100 completed applications.

The Top 100 were also provided with customized, advanced widgets and web pages on the Case Foundation website to help them with their fundraising and outreach.

In addition, each of the Top 100 were offered a proposal coach to help them craft a compelling and distinctive proposal that would enhance their chances of winning a grant. These proposal coaches were paid short term contractors to the Foundation with substantial experience in fundraising, grantmaking, community development, and/or citizen-centered work that the Foundation recruited from its pool of external reviewers and other networks.

Each coach committed to spending up to two hours with up to ten applicants each. Coaches also were asked to participate in a brief online training that provided context about the MIYO program and process, as well as suggestions for what grantees might be looking for in terms of assistance. The coaches served in advisory capacity and did not write proposals on behalf of applicants.



To elicit public participation in the voting process, the Case Foundation engaged in several extensive local and national outreach and marketing endeavors, including garnering agreements from more than 100 partner organizations to help publicize the MIYO program and encourage participation in it among their networks and members. The Foundation also released a viral video about MIYO, engaged in a national media campaign, and pitched all Top 20 stories to local media.

## Thinking of inviting the public to support your grantmaking? Here are some things to consider:

- Fair.** Require voters to pick more than one candidate. Encourage them to read about the projects and decide, rather than playing favorites. Present candidate profiles in the same voice and clarity. Randomize the order in which candidates show up on your website, so everyone appears equal.
- Easy.** Make it as simple as possible for voters. The less clicks, the better.
- Fun.** Offer people incentives for voting.
- Legit.** Use technology—and an expert in elections—to verify votes.
- Tech-friendly.** Offer candidates technology, such as widgets, to spread the word about their projects.
- Supportive.** Offer candidates a coach to help them market their project and gain support.

■ Getting to the Final Four and results.

Voting was open for four weeks, during which time 15,232 people voted to select the Final Four. Voters, however, were asked to select four projects, not just their personal favorite—a tactic that was deliberately instituted to encourage voters to read the stories and make informed decisions.

Additionally, the Foundation programmed the ballot so that each time voters entered or refreshed the page, the order in which the Top 20 appeared was randomized, which helped level the playing field and ensure that voters were less likely to be biased by those who appeared at the top of the list. For the same reason, the Foundation chose not to employ use of a “leader board” and did not reveal participants’ standing to them during the voting process.

To prevent “robot voting,” the Foundation employed captcha and email confirmations to stop voters from creating systems that voted repeatedly. It also commissioned an outside vendor with deep experience with online elections to verify all the votes. An additional incentive the Foundation offered was \$2,500 to the first 10 people who picked the exact four winners determined by public vote—money that could be used as a gift to any charity of the person’s choice.



### ■ Ongoing technical assistance and training.

During and following the MIYO grant process, the Case Foundation provided a series of webinars and other online resources for applicants and, later the Top 100 and winners, including information about marketing, social media, and fundraising.

### ■ Grant process.

In June 2008, the Foundation made initial grants to the 20 winners, all of whom were required to submit a progress and final report. In partnership with Everyday Democracy, the Case Foundation also convened the entire group at a special event in Baltimore, Maryland, that allowed winners to meet each other and celebrate their efforts, and learn more about citizen-centered, community-based work from leaders in the field.

## WHAT WINNERS RECEIVED

|   |   |
|---|---|
| <p><b>Everyone who submitted a completed application received:</b></p>  | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• A Customized Fundraising Widget... Innovative technology tools that helped them share project ideas with others and raise money online</li> <li>• An issue of GOOD Magazine, the hip and edgy new publication for people who want to make a difference, compliments of the Case Foundation and GOOD (The first 1,000 applicants received a 12-month subscription to the magazine)</li> </ul> |
| <p><b>The top 100 individuals who are invited to submit full proposals, and who submit their proposals according to Case Foundation guidelines, received:</b></p> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Everything listed above, plus</li> <li>• \$100 to jump-start their online fundraising campaign</li> <li>• A copy of <i>The World We Want: New Dimensions in Philanthropy and Social Change</i> by H. Peter Karoff with Jane Maddox</li> </ul>  |
| <p><b>The 20 individuals chosen as finalists received:</b></p>  | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Everything listed above, plus</li> <li>• A \$10,000 grant to help make their idea a reality</li> <li>• An opportunity to meet in person with other finalists, share ideas, and learn new skills to help implement projects</li> </ul>  |
| <p><b>The final four individuals that voters chose online received:</b></p>   | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Everything listed above, plus</li> <li>• A grant of \$25,000 to help make their idea a reality—for a grand total of \$35,100</li> </ul>  |

# WHO WON?



**Child/Youth Friendly City**  
**Nancy Gilder** Denver, CO

"The process of infusing youth voice in community decision making and creating opportunities for youth engagement across the city will create a more livable community for all people."



**Citizen Participation**  
**Keith Twitchell** New Orleans, LA

"This project will create a permanent mechanism for the people of New Orleans to have a formal, accountable voice in city government policies and decisions."



**Community Conversations**  
**Kate McPherson** Vancouver, WA

"We will connect youth with adults through Community Conversations and on line resources so they can discover how to use their unique skills and experiences to create more effective schools and communities."



**Community Vision Project**  
**Imre Kepes** Pelham, MA

"Youth act as catalysts to bring people together to overcome differences and recognize the common goal of creating a better world."



**Conversations for Change**  
**Lisa Harper** New York, NY

"We aim to build safe arenas for dialog between the police and the South Bronx community in an effort to build bridges of understanding, mutual respect, and a plan for change."



**Crossing Borders**  
**Nan Kari** St. Paul, MN

"Our approach is grounded in a practical democratic theory. It views citizens as co-producers of public things, an identity that goes well beyond the legal definition of citizen."



**DCCV**  
**Bridget Murphy** Menomonie, WI

"The DCCV project asks citizens what they value in their community and what they would like to preserve and change."



**Deliberative Democracy**  
**Mark Shoul** Royalston, MA

"More trusting relationships, an expanding pool of respected voices, and successful actions are helping discouraged residents realize that common ground can be found, and that they can be successful in building a healthy community and democracy."



**Five Two Eight O**  
**Janna Goodwin** Denver, CO

"We create identity and community through the stories we live and the stories we tell," says Janna. "Together, as citizens and artists, we'll share experiences, create meaningful theatre, talk about it and find ways to improve our neighborhoods, our city and our lives."



**Front Porch Forum**  
**Michael Wood-Lewis** Burlington, VT

"Our goal is use an active online community to create cultural change away from isolation and toward connectedness and involvement, regardless of personal and political differences."



**In Search of the Commons**  
**Jim Barrett** Livingston, MT

"By allowing everyone in our community to express their positive values about the present, we will be more likely to recognize our shared responsibility to ensure healthy landscapes into the future."



**Juveniles 4 Justice (J4J)**  
**Jessica Feerman** Philadelphia, PA

"Youth have the ideas and inspiration to work for change. Their age, incarceration, and poverty, however, often prevent them from obtaining the resources and support they need to do so."



**Leaders of the New School**  
**Asad Jafri** Chicago, IL

"As for a greater impact, the art produced by this project will address community issues and try to offer solutions for them as well as mobilize the community to take action whenever other issues are identified."



**Madison SOS**  
**Natalia Thompson** Madison, WI

According to Natalia, "In this dynamic citizen-centered program, high school teen girls will lead a diverse group of peers in creating a platform for grassroots action on local issues, rooted in a vision for the future of their community."



**Making Health Our Own**  
**Susan Sloan** Bellingham, WA

"'Making Health Our Own' is not limited to preventing communicable and chronic diseases and disability," said Sloan. "It is the vision of maximizing both the length and quality of each resident's life by creating a community of participation and caring."



**My School is Your School**  
**Dominick Maldonado** New Haven, CT

"We are committed to creating a warm and caring atmosphere, two-way engagement, stronger relationships, and ownership that will enhance all students' academic success."



**Natural Environment Forum**  
**Kate Irwin** Sarasota, FL

"Many of our citizens are looking for ways to help the environment, but... they don't know the options to do so. Our goal is to bring people together and allow them to build bonds and create change in our community."



**Re-Imagining our City**  
**Fiona Cheong** Pittsburgh, PA

"The dream behind the plan is connecting neighborhoods to the rivers so that as the city develops its waterfront there will also be green spaces that stimulate outdoor life and that will be accessible to all its residents."



**UNCommon Council**  
**Keith Herring** Syracuse, NY

"The council is an ongoing space for the community to connect, dialogue, and work together to create lasting solutions for the common good."



**Wilson For The Ages**  
**David Criswell** Wilson, KS

"We intend to bring about a culture change in Wilson to one that listens to and includes all people, identifies needs and takes action – this as a normal and expected way of living together as a community."

# FULL EVALUATION RESULTS

Evaluation has been an integral component of everything the Case Foundation undertakes, and the MIYO program is no exception. Since the beginning of the process, the Foundation has collected data about nearly every step of it—from asking external reviewers for their opinions to surveying groups of winners to see how they were progressing.

In the following section of the report, authors and researchers provide detailed analysis as to whether the MIYO process, grants, and other benefits to the applicants had positive effects and, especially, had helped to support high-quality citizen-centered work that would not have occurred without the MIYO initiative. The data collected in this evaluation have also had the additional benefit of providing an unprecedented picture of citizen-centered efforts occurring in America during the later part of the '00s—information that had previously been difficult to obtain and will be of considerable use to the field.

## SURVEY RESPONDENTS WERE ASKED:

- their current definitions of “citizen-centeredness”;
- their rating of how “citizen-centered” their own work is;
- their overall rating of their own success;
- their achievements in fundraising, recruiting, convening discussions, and gaining attention;
- the scale of their efforts;
- their success in convening diverse discussions and convening people who disagree;
- their success in engaging marginalized groups, moving to consensus, moving from talk to action, achieving positive effects, sustaining engagement, and sustaining partnerships;
- their development of youth leadership;
- their completion of baseline research, convening of deliberative meetings, and convening of other meetings;
- their work on creating a website, a blog, or a social network presence;
- their training activities;
- their development of consensus statements;
- their contacts with public officials, and the media;
- volunteering that emerged from their work; and
- the numbers of people they had engaged, trained, brought together to deliberate, and attracted as audiences



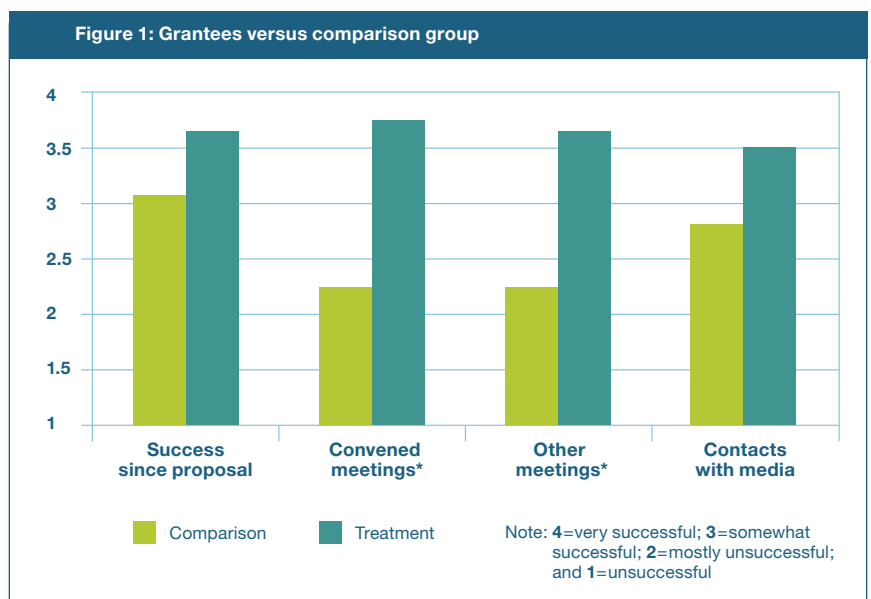
## What Was The Impact Of The MIYO Process On The Winners?

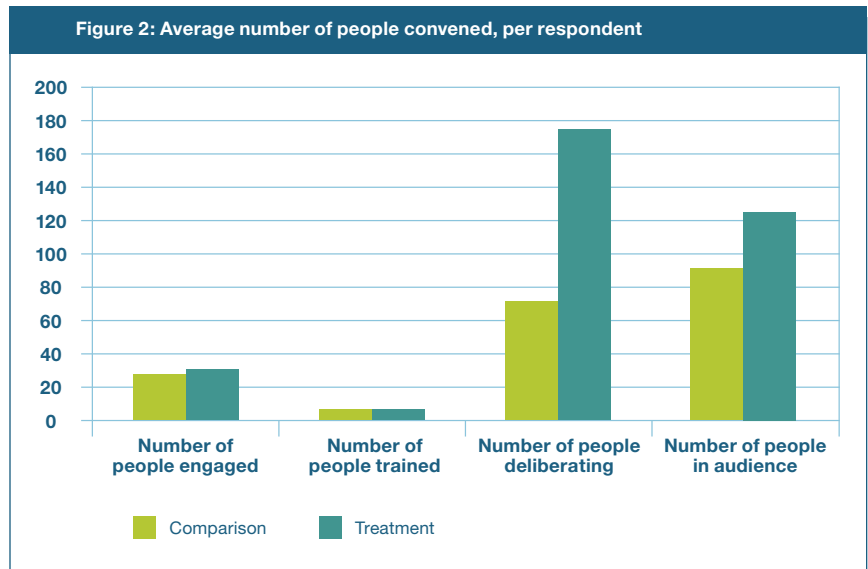
As noted, MIYO winners not only received financial resources but also technical support and advice (especially about marketing and social media), web tools, and access to a closed social network—all resources they likely would not otherwise have had.

To test whether these resources had any effects on applicants' efforts, researchers compared the 20 MIYO grantees to a group of 17 projects that made the "Top 100" list but ultimately did not win a grant. The assumption was that if grantees were more successful than those who weren't selected as winners, it would suggest that the MIYO program had contributed to this difference. (This assumption was based on both groups receiving almost identical average scores by the Case Foundation's outside peer reviewers.)

Members of both groups answered 31 survey questions about their work since the MIYO program. Although there were not many significant differences in the groups, a few did appear.

- Winners were able to conduct real public meetings that would otherwise have been too expensive or difficult to pull off.** (See Figures 1 & 2.) As one grantee said, "A three-day meeting with food would have been too expensive for any local public agency, so it never would have happened without the Case grant." That meeting led to a detailed plan that community participants are now working to implement. There was also evidence, albeit less pronounced, that winners were able to attract more people to these "civic spaces" than non-winners. (The former difference is statistically significant; the latter is not.)

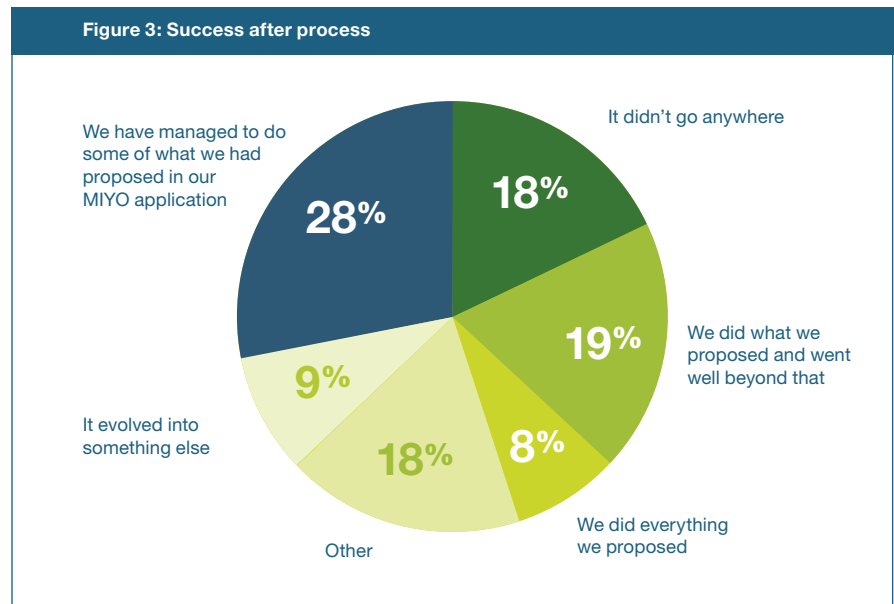




- **The grant award helped several winners to diversify their funding bases and, in turn, sustain their work.** This benefit emerged in interviews rather than from surveys. One interviewee noted, “The Case-funded project kept my organization going long enough for it to diversify its funding base.” This organization has since prospered and expanded. Another grantee attracted enough funding from other sources to expand its efforts to several other communities beyond the original site.
- **Grantees said that participants in their projects and events gained civic work skills and motivation to participate in these kinds of efforts in the future.** Although the survey did not measure this outcome, it emerged during the interview stage of the evaluation, with several grantees stating they believed the MIYO program had been successful in helping to motivate participants in their efforts to continue their engagement or gain confidence in their leadership skills. One grantee who works with low-income urban youth, for example, reported how a community member who had been reluctant to participate (and “only joined for the free pizza”) became highly involved over time. In addition to recruiting both his brothers to join the effort, he has since presented at panels before state legislators about the issue the MIYO-awarded project was addressing.

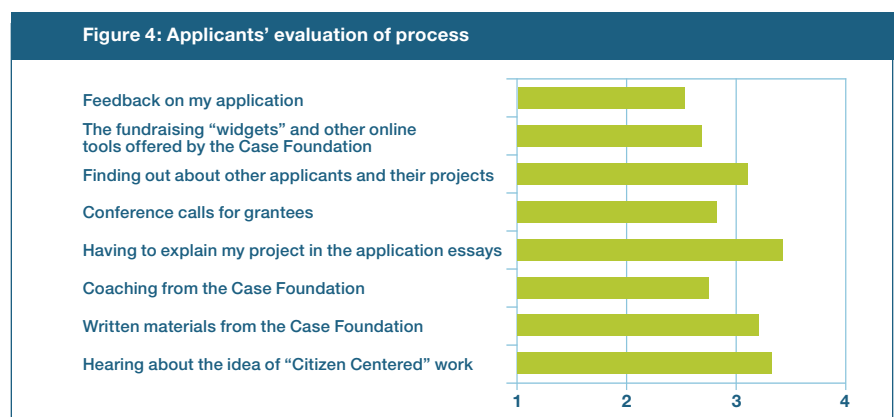
### What Was The Impact Of The MIYO Process On The Non-Winners?

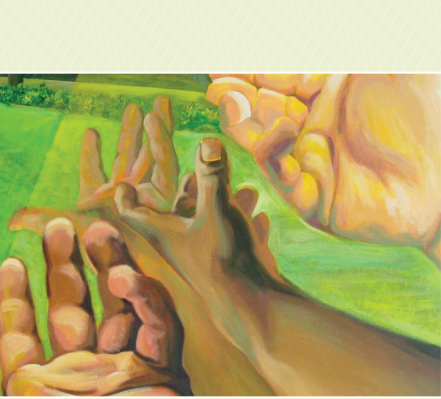
One of the original purposes of the MIYO process was to generate citizen-centered work by encouraging people to develop proposals which they might implement even if they were not selected. Research indicates that 27 percent of the survey respondents from the original applicant pool (mostly non-winners) reported that they either did the project they proposed or completed that project and went well beyond it. Only 18 percent said that they had gone nowhere, with the rest in between, giving answers like “we have managed to do some of what we proposed.” (See Figure 3.)



### What Did Applicants Think About The MIYO Process?

- **Survey respondents were generally positive about the MIYO application process.** On a scale from 1 (“a complete waste of my time”) to 4 (“very helpful to my work”), the average responses were mostly between 3 and 4. (A score of 3 meant “somewhat helpful, but could have been better”). (See Figure 4.)



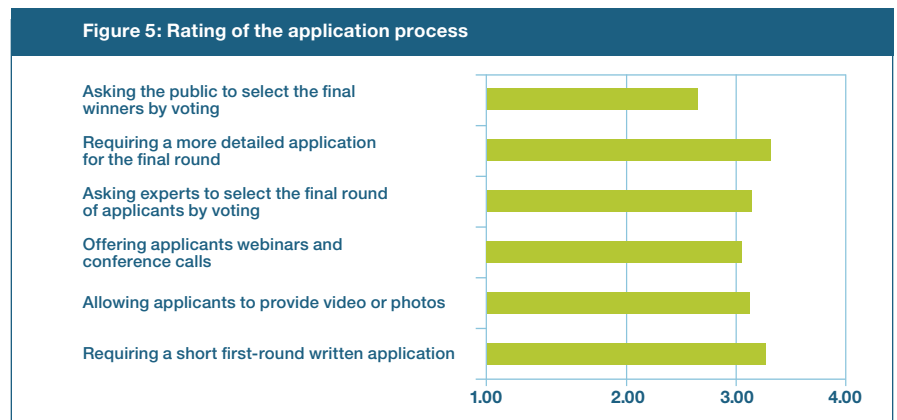


- **The most beneficial part of the MIYO process to all applicants was “learning more about the citizen-centered concept”—and having the opportunity to outline the details of their own projects.** Almost half (46%) of applicants considered hearing about citizen-centered approaches to be “very helpful” to their work and found it “exciting” because “it completely fits what we do.” They also said having the opportunity to delineate their plans via the application process, particularly the essay questions, was beneficial and useful.
- **Participants liked the feedback provided by the coaches.** Overall, finalists appreciated the coaches the Foundation provided to help them prepare their proposals for judging. Most of those interviewed said they were impressed by the individuals with whom they’d been paired, suggesting that the effort to offer more personalized technical assistance to finalists was an important aspect of the process.
- **Many grantees were dissatisfied with the detail and paperwork required for their proposal submissions and the process itself “for such a small final grant.”** One grantee estimated that the time required to prepare her final proposal took “at least 100 hours,” which set back his/her organization’s planning process. Others complained that the “amount of work required for this program wasn’t justified by the amount of the grants.”
- **Grantees did not feel that the various opportunities provided to them by the Foundation, including widgets and social media trainings, were really optional.** As one grantee noted, s/he felt that they had to post a video once that opportunity was offered. This was largely due to grantees’ fears of disappointing funders because “they are gods,” as one said.
- **Applicants had mixed feelings about the Case Foundation’s online trainings and webinars.** The online trainings and webinars the Foundation held throughout the process covered a wide range of topics such as citizen-centered approaches; “how tos” for online tools; and project management; and financial matters related to grant awards. Applicants differed widely in their knowledge of each of these three areas; as a result, some thought that the information was too basic, and others, too difficult. One interviewee said the webinars and other trainings were useful, but they were “too hard.” Another remarked that “too much new information was presented too quickly,” although she also described the training as “much better than nothing.” Another thought that the material was “too elementary” and should have addressed harder questions such as how this work could be sustained over time.

### The Make It Your Own Grants

Survey respondents were asked to rate various methods used by the Case Foundation to select MIYO winners (see figure 5). On the rating scale provided, 1 meant “simply wastes time or resources”; 2 meant “not worthwhile”; 3 was “useful”; and 4 was “essential or highly valuable.”

Most aspects of the process were rated useful, but the final public voting process was least popular. Respondents rated it 2.64 on a 4-point scale. The Top 100 rated it slightly lower (2.58), as did the Top 20, the applicants who were actually subject to public voting (2.56). (Note: These differences are not statistically significant.) (See Figure 5.)



Interviews revealed certain specific complaints about the voting process. Some applicants felt it was biased in favor of projects in large cities, appearing to be a “popularity contest” for “projects that were able to mobilize supporters to vote for them.” Some interviewees said the work required to compete in the voting round was not worth the amount of money provided to the winners.

Another complaint surfaced several times: There were apparently technical glitches that prevented some people from voting, especially if they had dial-up connections. It was frustrating to persuade an individual to vote and have the technology not work.

Although the applicants were not especially enthusiastic about the voting process, it may have had benefits they overlooked, including exposing interesting citizen-centered projects to the general public. During the MIYO process, for example, the Foundation website received approximately 45,000 unique visits to the online ballot, with more than 60,000 votes cast by 15,232 individuals (each person had to vote for four projects.)

# THE ONLINE (AND OFFLINE) TOOLS AND ASSISTANCE

Given its roots in building online community, as well as its desire to ensure applicants continued their efforts (even if they did not become grant winners), the Case Foundation created a number of venues for using technology as a way to make the process as fair and supportive to grant applicants as possible.

To that end, the Foundation provided all applicants with extensive information and resources about citizen-centered engagement on its website. It also shared online trainings and online interactive marketing and fundraising tools such as widgets that could be distributed on Facebook, MySpace, blogs or other online venues.

Every applicant received a customized webpage and widget, pre-populated with their application information, and hosted on the Chipln website. The Top 100 also received \$100 to kickstart an online fundraising campaign, in addition to a profile on the Foundation's web site that featured project photos, diaries, videos, a fundraising widget, and other information about the applicant. Each Top 100 applicant also received grant writing advice and support from a proposal coach, drawn from an external group of philanthropy and nonprofit experts who gave feedback on crafting their full proposal.

In the final stage, the Top 20's widgets were automatically turned into voting banners, allowing people to vote in just a few clicks. Beyond technology, all Top 20 finalists received personal support from outreach ambassadors who advised applicants on how to network, mobilize supporters, and talk to the media. The Foundation also provided candidate kits—customized mini-marketing plans with press releases, flyers, and more.

To promote and market the Top 20 ideas and attract voters, the Case Foundation gathered a strong group of partners, each with the ability to introduce the Make It Your Own Awards™ and citizen-centered engagement to a wide and active audience. These included Bebo, MTV Think, GOOD Magazine, Ning, Black Planet, Mi Gente, Asian Avenue, and YouthNoise.

In addition, nearly 200 other organizations joined the Foundation by inviting their members and users to vote for the project they believed presented the strongest case for bringing people together to take responsibility and address the needs of their communities.

Finally, as a means of encouraging voters to read and research the Top 20 finalists, the first ten people who voted correctly for the four projects that the online voting community eventually selected as the Final Four, received a \$2,500 Good Card. Good Cards, sponsored by the Case Foundation and administered through Network for





Good (NetworkforGood.org), allow recipients to use the dollar amount on the card toward a donation to a U.S.-based charity of their choice. In total, 89 people correctly picked all four of the final grantees.

### What Were The Benefits And Challenges Of The Online Tools That MIYO Provided?

By and large, the entire MIYO process occurred online. Applicants submitted their citizen-centered projects online. They mobilized their communities online. The Top 100 interacted with supporters through the profile for their project on the Case Foundation website, and the Top 20 recruited votes online.

When the MIYO Awards commenced in June 2007, online tools such as fundraising widgets, social networks, and online voting programs were relatively new. The popular Facebook application Causes, for example, had only been in existence for about two months, and although individuals were joining Causes, they were not making contributions in large numbers. This led some early observers to suggest online fundraising using new tools was a fad.

Fig. 6: Online tools provided

| Description   | All Applicants | Top 100 | Top 20 |
|---|----------------|---------|--------|
| Initial online application  | Yes            | Yes     | Yes    |
| Online trainings and resources  | Yes            | Yes     | Yes    |
| A fundraising widget  | Yes            | Yes     | Yes    |
| \$100 to kick-start fundraising campaign  | No             | Yes     | Yes    |
| Full proposal online  | No             | Yes     | Yes    |
| Profile on the Case Foundation website, featuring a project diary, photos, and videos, and commenting | No             | Yes     | Yes    |
| Outreach ambassador and candidate kit   | No             | No      | Yes    |

Despite the newness of this technology—particularly, its application to fundraising for social causes or projects—MIYO applicants appeared to welcome the invitation to innovate, experiment, and learn. Their experience with the online tools the Case Foundation provided as part of the grantmaking process, as well as tools they discovered on their own, provides valuable knowledge about how to use fundraising and online voting initiatives in ways that help the entire nonprofit sector more broadly.

Major findings in this area were:

- **The MIYO process introduced relatively cutting-edge fundraising and marketing tools at a time when most citizen-centered projects were still struggling to master the basics of traditional online engagement.** Since the Foundation was not able to fund all the projects, it gave all 4,641 applicants widgets to use as advertising banners on websites that could, in turn, help applicants raise awareness and funds for their project. Each of the 100 semi-finalists also received \$100 to jumpstart their online fundraising efforts. The fundraising widgets were interesting at the time because they offered users an interactive “Donate Now” button that could reside on their web pages and, at the same time, present the opportunity to raise money in a new way for their cause. Given the newness of this technology, it was hoped that applicants would serve as first adopters in showing how “citizen philanthropy” could be successful. Most, however, were still struggling to learn how to be more proficient at using technology for more basic outreach purposes such as websites and email.
- **Only 33 of the Top 100 finalist received a donation beyond the \$100 the Foundation provided.** The most amount of the money raised from a widget provided by the Foundation to the Top 100 applicants was \$1,219 from 23 donors—well below the \$10,000 that each of the Top 20 projects received from the Foundation—indicating that a “new wave of citizen philanthropy” had yet to materialize. As one interviewee observed, “We have found that the majority of people who are interested in donating would rather send a check. We put the fundraising widget in all of the places suggested, and nobody used it.” The low success rate of the fundraising widgets also suggests that MIYO applicants may have lacked the time and energy to manage a full-fledged personal fundraising campaign and/or were not provided with best incentives to experiment more extensively with the tool. If the MIYO process were launched today—a time in which social networks have become more essential to individuals and organizations—these results may be different, given that applicants would be more likely to have networks in place and “ready to respond” when they posted a widget and/or fundraising appeal.
- **Seven of the 20 MIYO winners and 94 of the 457 non-winners who responded to the survey indicated the fundraising widget and other online tools provided by the Case Foundation were somewhat or very helpful in ways other than raising funds.** Although the Case Foundation did not provide online tools for project management (e.g., recruiting volunteers, discussions, etc.), many MIYO applicants used online tools of their own choosing for these tasks. As one interviewee said, “I thought the [widget] was amazing. I had no idea it existed, but loved the concept.” The same interviewee noted later, “Although we didn’t use the online tools for raising significant amounts of money, we were able to use it for project management and volunteer recruitment.” Many MIYO applicants implemented online tools of their own choosing to help manage their projects. Survey respondents frequently cited tools such as Survey Monkey, Basecamp, Highrise, Constant Contact, MySpace, Google groups, and other volunteer recruitment sites as invaluable online tools.

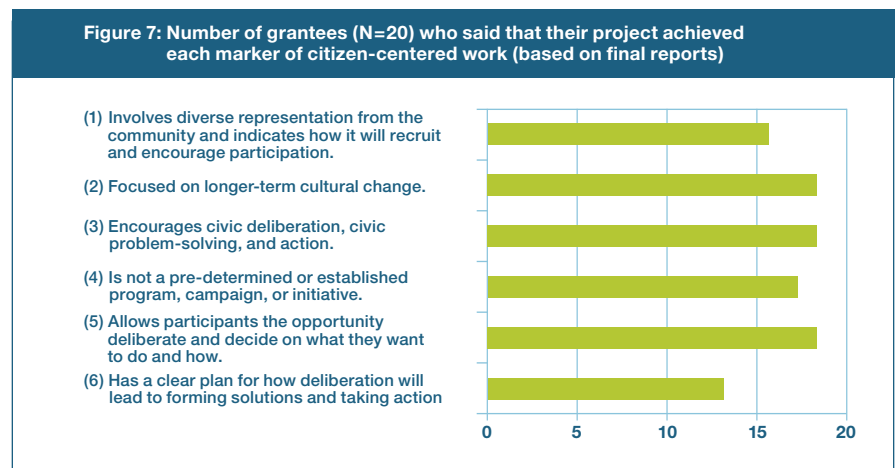




- **Email and simple web pages were the most effective and used methods for applicants and winners to engage with their supporters.** As one interviewee noted, email is still “the killer application” for civic engagement, and she was not alone. Many applicants indicated that websites and emails were the primary ways in which they communicated with people in their communities and with participants in their projects.
- **Survey respondents and interviewees consistently indicated they did not have enough time to make the most of the online tools at their disposal.** In fact, only 1 of 477 survey respondents noted that technology saved her time. More typical was this observation from an interviewee: “We manage so much of our life online these days, so this makes us ‘more savvy.’ But we have to fit so many tasks into our ‘online time.’ Online technology almost competes with itself to find a place in our schedule.” The lack of time to experiment with online tools may have factored into the low success rate of the fundraising widget, as well as to the general frustration that surfaced in response to survey questions relating to online tools.
- **Since 2007 and 2008, however, the majority of citizen-centered projects represented in the MIYO Awards have used the Internet to advance their projects.** Although this is still largely through the use of emails and webpages as indicated above, nearly three-quarters of survey respondents indicated that they had used technology to communicate with their supporters. More than half reported using the Internet to recruit and coordinate volunteers and to facilitate discussions, and 38 percent of applicants have used the Internet to raise money since the MIYO Awards.

## ONE YEAR OUT: WHAT HAPPENED?

In July 2009, one year after grants were awarded, MIYO grantees were asked to describe in detail what had occurred during this time, including specific achievements or obstacles they had experienced. All 20 grantees reported high levels of success: (See Figure 7.)



In each of these six areas, more grantees reported success at the final stage than at the interim stage. The biggest change was in the area of “allowing participants the opportunity to deliberate and decide on what they want to do and how.” Twelve grantees checked this box at the interim stage; 18 in their final reports. The lowest self-evaluation was for “having a clear plan for how deliberation will lead to forming solutions and taking action.” Thirteen grantees reported that they had such a plan at the end, up from nine grantees at the interim stage.

Four grantees reported better collaborations with community partners in their final report than they had in their interim report. But five grantees reported less satisfaction with their partners at the end of the project than in their interim reports. Overall, levels of satisfaction were somewhat lower at the end than in the middle of the project.

In partial contrast, grantees were more satisfied with citizens’ enthusiasm at the end than at the time of the interim report. Only two were less satisfied at the end than in the interim stage.

As an overall self-judgment, 13 out of 20 grantees (65%) considered themselves at an “advanced” level of citizen-centered work at the end of the project, compared to 11 grantees (or 55%) at the interim stage. Some grantees did not complete this question on both surveys. If we exclude the non-responses, the proportion of “advanced” projects was 65% at the interim stage and 81% at the end.

## TWO YEARS OUT: WHERE ARE THEY NOW?

Recognizing the importance of longitudinal analysis, in August 2010—approximately two years after the grants were awarded—the Case Foundation reached out again to all 20 MIYO grantees to see what had happened with their projects. The Foundation was able to reach 19 of the 20 grantees and conducted interviews with each to ask for updates on their progress.

**...16 MIYO grantees (80 percent) reported that they had continued their efforts beyond the final grant period.**

Of the 19 grantees contacted, 16 MIYO grantees (80 percent) reported that they had continued their efforts beyond the final grant period. Of these, ten reported that they continued to be successful in meeting all six indicators of citizen-centered work.

Of the remaining six grantees, four indicated that they had difficulty in developing a plan for how deliberation would lead to forming solutions, and two were struggling with ensuring diverse representation. Two of the six organizations found it challenging to ensure that the meetings didn't reflect a pre-determined agenda and that it went beyond a "one shot" effort. Three of the 19 projects had ended or been forced to close, due largely to the inability of the original leaders to continue serving in that capacity.

- In Wisconsin, **Dunn County Community Visioning** (DCCV), a community visioning project has begun replicating its deliberation model in communities around the country and in Canada.
- In New Orleans, **Citizen Participation** helped secure passage of a charter amendment that mandates a citizen participation program in the city's operations and that the city will likely subsidize. There will also be a chapter on citizen participation included in the master plan for the city.
- **Conversations for Change**, an effort to convene police officers and community citizens in New York City, started slowly but now has "100 percent support" from the police department; in fact, some of the project's "most committed participants are NYPD officers." The group has also been publicly recognized by the Bronx borough president and others with reach and influence in the community.
- In Vermont, **Front Porch Forum**, a project to connect people online now has 20,000 users across the state and more than 100,000 postings and was recently featured in Yankee magazine. The piece described how the forum helped connect a dying young mother with some of her neighbors whom she'd never met. After learning about the mother's health problems, neighbors arranged for dinner to be brought to her house every night, volunteered to walk her dog, drove her children to school, and sent the family expressions of support.



- In Philadelphia, **Juveniles for Justice**, which is helping young people in the juvenile justice system reintegrate into their communities, was asked to make a presentation about its work to the city's Department of Health and Human services. It has also just created a similar effort focused on young people in the foster care system.
- In Florida, the **Summit for Environmental Action** has spawned four committees, one of which is now part of the local government, to find solutions to issues identified by community residents in convenings held by the group during the grant period. All of these committees are now increasingly being asked to partner with other organizations to leverage this work. Recently, Good Magazine and the Ringling College of Art and Design partnered with one committee to run a campaign to encourage students to design new solutions to the community's water problems.
- In Chicago, **Leaders of the New School** (LONS) recruited young people from the city's southwest side to meet and discuss community issues and the power of art, especially social media and hip hop music, to inspire social change. Initially launched with 20 young people, the project is expanding to include 35 more participants. The project went beyond just the individual participants, however, reaching more than 400 community residents—parents, educators, religious leaders, and others—who took part in LONS' activities during the grant year. The first class of young leaders also has agreed to assume leadership in raising the funds needed to make the project financially sustainable.

Grantees were also forthright about what they weren't able to achieve and why:

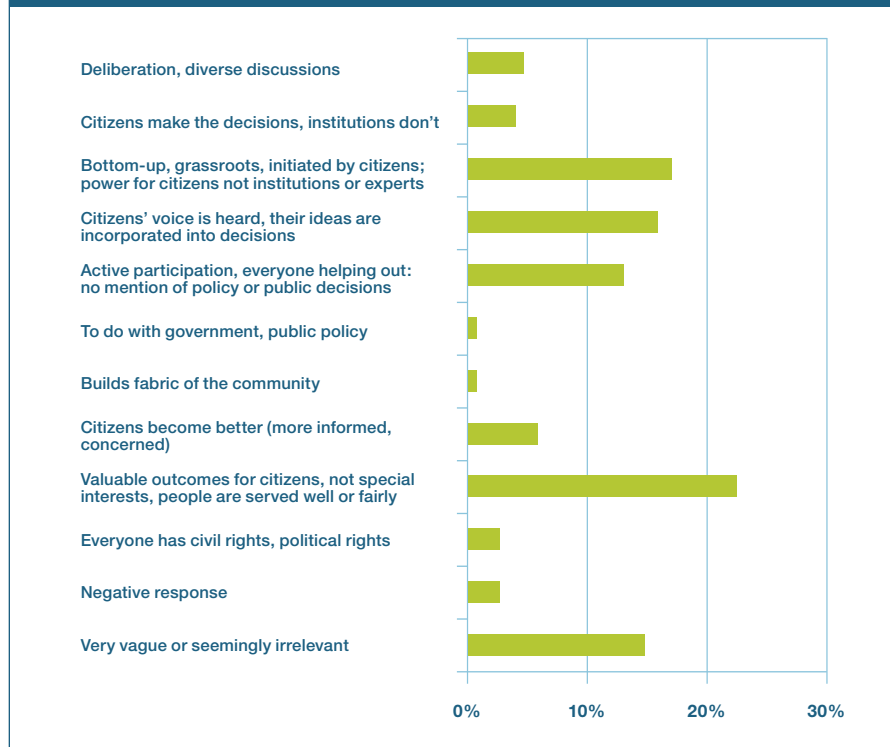
- County and city budget cuts were a serious issue for two MIYO grantees that counted on public resources for support. Both, however, noted that these cuts also presented opportunities for them. As one leader said, "The recession in some ways was a blessing in disguise because those cuts led to an increase in the awareness about the need for more civic dialogue and volunteering." Another commented that "the financial crisis ended up spurring support for our project from the community. Interest has increased but so have the challenges."
- A major challenge for a few grantees was keeping the momentum going, specifically, keeping people interested in the project.
- An initiative to convene new immigrants and community residents grappled with language barriers, as well as many participants' lack of knowledge about and access to computers/technology. To overcome these issues, the group constructed a community map showing differences and intersections among the participants and what happens when "a diverse group of people come together."
- Funding was an ongoing challenge for several of the projects, but not necessarily one that precluded them from moving forward. One exception was a project in the Midwest, which reported being "stretched too thin" and in need of funding to ensure public involvement in completing a city planning process.

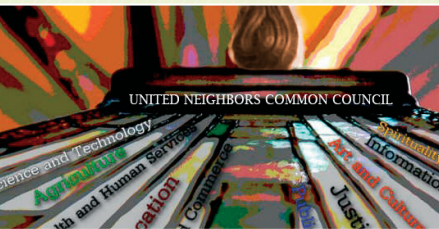
## WHAT DOES THIS ALL MEAN FOR CITIZEN-CENTERED APPROACHES TO CIVIC ENGAGEMENT?

Overall, “citizen-centered” approaches to civic engagement needs more marketing and communication about what, exactly, the concept means and why they are needed. As noted, applicants generally appreciated hearing about the “citizen-centered” concept, but that did not mean they all understood it. When asked to define the phrase, applicants’ answers varied widely, and not very many included key elements of the Case Foundation’s definition, such as the need for diverse discussions. A common answer was “serving people better,” e.g., “basic services given to the community/public and without regards to race, color, sex, creed, nationality. Everyone can be served.” (See Figure 8.)

Hardly anyone said that in citizen-centered projects, the outcomes or objectives are left open for deliberation instead of being defined from the beginning. A rare example would be this definition: “people discussing and working directly on local/community issues with other people who may or may not hold views different from their own.”

Figure 8: “Citizen centered” definitions





As expected, MIYO winners understood the concept of “citizen-centeredness” much better than other applicants and were more enthusiastic about it. One winner thought that the phrase was jargon—a good as any of the alternative phrases, but not moving for most citizens, who care more about local issues and problems. A community partner of one grantee said he had not heard the phrase before. He did understand it, but he personally used “community-centered” instead and also liked “civic culture” as a defining phrase.

Applicants who defined “citizen-centered” consistently with the Case Foundation’s definition fared substantially better than other applicants in the process. For instance, those who thought in terms of good services for citizens received an average of 94 points from peer-reviewers in the process, compared to 112 points for those who wrote about citizens’ voices being heard or their ideas being incorporated into decisions. (The peer reviewers did not see their definitions, which were provided on surveys completed long after the MIYO program itself.)

Thus, it appears that the MIYO process was good at distinguishing truly citizen-centered applicants from those interested in service provision. It also appears that many groups that would like to see themselves as “citizen-centered” are still basically interested in serving the public.

These findings reinforce the need for marketing or dissemination in the future. One of the grantees suggested a major focus of future efforts should be “training and marketing to leaders” so they can learn to “let go a little.” She felt that if they understood the citizen-centered concept, they might become more open to genuine public engagement. Another applicant felt the Foundation should seed and publicize a “critical mass” of citizen-centered projects so leaders can understand that they work.

**Citizen-centered work takes time and patience ...** Community engagement and problem-solving involving wide swaths of communities are not easy, nor do they lead to results quickly. Convening public meetings are only one part of the process, although they nearly always form the foundation for ongoing, sustained civic work. Thus, the Foundation’s efforts to lay that groundwork seem to have borne fruit.

**...but it appears that when provided with resources and support, it can be sustainable.** Two years after grant awards, 80 percent of the winners were still highly involved with their projects and had made plans to continue them, indicating that this program was able to give them the foundation from which to do so.

**That support doesn’t necessarily mean providing enormous amounts of money.** At a time when investors are seeking new ways to “change the world” with less resources, it appears supporting these kinds of community-based, citizen-centered efforts can serve as a relatively low-cost yet potentially effective strategy. Citizen-centered engagement not only helps entire communities address particular issues of concern to them, but also strengthens the capacity of that community to address whatever issue confronts them in the future.



**Technology is important to strengthening communities and citizen-centered efforts, but its uses must be developed and implemented appropriately and strategically.** Funders often value technology and its considerable potential for fundraising, marketing, organizing, recruitment, and program implementation. But that potential may go unrealized if those individuals the funders are targeting do not have the time, resources, and/or inclination to use it.

It is also important to understand the tricky balancing act that occurs between encouraging experimentation with technology and encouraging true citizen-centered community-based efforts in which residents themselves decide what makes the most sense for their communities in terms of communication and networks. Those wanting to encourage more technology use in these efforts, therefore, may want to consider working with communities to map and/or assess the technological skills and needs of those communities first and then again with residents, designing projects that will capitalize on this knowledge.

Foundations, corporations, and community leaders may want to consider providing trainings for individuals in communities where citizen-centered projects are occurring. These trainings could focus on the benefits of technology, what it offers, and how to use it most effectively. They could be tiered in terms of people's comfort levels (e.g., basic, intermediate, advanced), as well as designed to help the leaders of citizen-centered efforts weave together more seamlessly the on-line and offline aspects of this work (an ongoing and major challenge).

## CASE STUDIES

### HANDS ACROSS NORTH QUABBIN

Mark Shoul Royalston, MA



Located in rural north central Massachusetts, North Quabbin has 26,000 residents who, for the past several years, have been reeling from a loss of manufacturing jobs, an underperforming school district, steep housing prices, growing numbers of working poor, and multi-generational poverty. These seemingly insurmountable problems had left residents increasingly frustrated.

Enter Mark Shoul and a dedicated group of community leaders. Prior to the Make it Your Own program, Shoul—a 30-year resident with deep experience in community development—and the leaders had been working on a project to change the region's civic culture “from one locked in polarization and ineffective problem solving to one with the capacity to find common ground and to collaboratively solve problems,” according to his proposal application.

The project's first major initiative was to convene a community conversation among 70 leaders of different backgrounds and perspectives to discuss the future direction of their school district. The common ground that these leaders discovered—and then quantified in a detailed strategic plan—was a central factor in turning the district's performance around.



## HANDS ACROSS NORTH QUABBIN

Continues...

With MIYO funding, Shoul and his colleagues was able to strengthen this effort—Hands Across North Quabbin (HANDS)—by recruiting and developing a critical mass of 200 diverse “civic innovators.” These innovators would be able to talk about and implement the Hands model across the region and recruit others to join too through public deliberation, meetings, priority-setting, and dialogue. Eventually, they would become a network core (or hub) from which other efforts would flow toward the goal of embedding these processes into the daily fabric of the community.

After receiving a MIYO grant, HANDS held a variety of events such as barbecues, “walks for collaboration,” spaghetti suppers, and other forums at local churches, schools, Lions Clubs, etc. to publicize the model and invite residents to join. They also recruited hundreds of residents to public meetings and conversations to talk about the region’s challenges and what to do about them—conversations that involved representatives from 26 key community agencies.

These efforts led to some impressive results, including raising the money for and building (mostly with volunteer help) a community pavilion that now sits by the lake in the central park of the region. HANDS also held a professionally facilitated public conversation during which residents chose an issue they believed was important to work on together: the economic crisis. The group decided to address this issue by creating a new organization that could “boost up the scale” of green activities in the nine-town North Quabbin region.

This new organization was called the North Quabbin Green Economy Network (GEN), which eventually persuaded seven different town governments in the region to join together to be certified by the state of Massachusetts as a “green community”—a designation that allows the community to compete for a portion of a pool of state money for renewable energy projects.

According to Shoul, “This joining together as a region so our nine small rural towns can speak and act as a cohesive block gives our community a much greater capacity to compete for economic development resources with much larger urban areas.”

Perhaps the greatest accomplishment has been a marked reduction in the tension among residents. In his final report to the Foundation, Shoul describes how HANDS and a network of other local organizations with related missions worked together to foster the growth of a “new civic climate in the community that causes conflicts to dampen down relatively quickly rather than flare up into open warfare as they did in the past.”

That perception is shared by Dave Flint, former Athol Lions Club Chair and the North Quabbin Chamber of Commerce’s “Man of the Year” in 2007, who said in an article that “the animosity that was going on in the community before has really been reduced.” HANDS’s members also point to more collaboration between for-profits

**“This joining together as a region so our nine small rural towns can speak and act as a cohesive block gives our community a much greater capacity to compete for economic development resources with much larger urban areas.”**

## HANDS ACROSS NORTH QUABBIN

Continues...

and nonprofits and with town governments, representatives of which have started meeting to explore regionalizing a range of community services.

HANDS, however, continues to struggle with financial challenges and making sure that the people in its network continue to be enthused and committed participants. It was only able to recruit 97 of its anticipated 200 “civic innovators,” although it believes that the group that is now in place is “well positioned” to move forward with a more ambitious plan with the community.

Whether the level of success that HANDS enjoyed would occur in a different kind of community is another question, Shoul admits. “The critical mass of individual and institutional support needed for changing civic cultures would probably be much smaller in our rural nine-town community of 26,000 residents than it would be if we were operating in a city of a million people,” he points out.

Shoul and the HANDS network continue to push forward with big plans for their region—plans that include public deliberation as a central driver for change. “The deliberative democracy process,” says Shoul, “is like getting a farmer to use a new plow—he has to see that it works. But once he does, he doesn’t use anything else.”

## MAKING HEALTH OUR OWN

Susan Sloan Bellingham, WA



Located in the northwestern-most corner of Washington, Whatcom County has approximately 193,000 residents. In January 2007, some of those residents attended a meeting held by the Whatcom County Health Advisory Board to brainstorm a process for establishing a county-wide comprehensive health plan.

But what would happen next? Susan Sloan and Regina Delahunt thought that what should happen next was involving residents in determining which health issues were most pressing and implementing action plans that would help create a healthier community over the long term. To that end, their project, Making Health Our Own (MHOO), began planning activities that would “establish an ongoing citizen-driven process” ensuring all residents have “the opportunity to mold a community vision for health.”

The MIYO grant award process came along at the right time for the group, which was planning to hold community conversations in conjunction with partners across the county. The goal of these meetings was for groups of residents—including those with “very divergent views”—to identify health issues of importance to Whatcom County residents.

With MIYO support, the group held ten such “Health Counts Community Conversations,” all of which used Open Space Technology. “Using Open Space was a truly citizen-centered approach,” says Susan Sloan, “because it assumed that people are first and foremost capable, and that when given responsibility and a safe environment in which to work they would also become energized and achieve innovative solutions.”

MHOO also held more than 20 focus groups (each of which included various stakeholder populations) and 33 individual interviews with health experts. The result was an exhaustive list of health-related issues, as well as a compelling vision of what

## MAKING HEALTH OUR OWN

Continues...

**“people are still so fixated on top management. The real innovators are grassroots people, not bigwigs!”**

a healthy Whatcom county would look like. The plan had buy-in from a wide swath of residents, as well as from leaders of key health and community groups, government officials, and businesses—almost 700 people.

To spur faster action, MHOO adopted a sense of urgency and partnered with several other community organizations already working on specific health issues. It discovered there wasn't a lot of public interest in communicable disease, which had been the traditional role of the public health department, so this brought other topics to the fore, among them, child health, health promotion, and health and the built environment.

As a next step, MHOO worked with its numerous organizational partners and resident participants to host a Future Search Conference—an effort also supported by the MIYO grant. “We were able to get the whole community in the room,” Sloan notes, “to work on the identified issue of child health—specifically to address the needs of children and youth with special health care needs. This issue was selected in large part because there was the will and energy on the part of many community members to move forward in taking action on this particular issue.”

It also helped that collaborations “were already seen as a good approach to problem-solving in our county,” Sloan says. “We know that new partnerships had emerged from the MHOO process and we wanted to honor the will of the people.”

In spring 2009, MHOO held a successful three-day Future Search Conference to develop an actionable vision for improving supports and service provision for children and youth with special health care needs [CYSHCN]. Conference participants came from education, government, social services, public health, medicine, psychology, non-profits, and youth and families. Out of this conference, Taking Action for CYSHCN was formed and has been moving forward ever since in the form of four action groups, a development team, and a coordinating council. Sloan says that, “The best part of Taking Action is that it truly represents the embodiment of a citizen-driven process.”

What have they learned? “Early on, we spent too much money on facilitators,” Sloan notes. “In hindsight, we wouldn't bring in a professional facilitator until much later in the process, when we are much clearer about what issue we were specifically ready to move forward.” She adds that there is still work to do around getting people to understand what citizen-centered efforts are “because people are still so fixated on top management. The real innovators are grassroots people, not bigwigs!”

A partner agency director agrees: “We were so excited to hear about MHOO and its focus on citizen-centered processes because it completely fits what we do and because the health care system now is anything but citizen-centered. Public processes around this issue and system are set up in ways that exclude citizens, and public input comes too late. Now, we're seeing early listening and a public voice when the question requires more than a yes or no!”

## LEADERS OF THE NEW SCHOOL

Asad Jafri Chicago, IL



A 29-year-old artist, organizer, and activist, Asad Jafri has been committed to improving the lives of young people on the south side of Chicago for several years through a combination of hip hop culture, martial arts, media, and health/education trainings and tools. Jafri, for example, had developed an artist collective called F.E.W. (From Every Walk) consisting of seven core members who shared a passion for hip hop culture and educating young people.

Then, in 2007, Jafri started working at the Inner-city Muslim Action Network (IMAN), a community based non profit based on Chicago's South Side. Through IMAN, Jafri and several teenagers living in the community conducted a youth needs assessment indicating that young people were nearly unanimous in their concern about the drugs, gangs, and violence plaguing their community. The needs assessment was conducted through two surveys, three large group discussions, thirty-five interviews, and countless analysis sessions.

Wanting to do something—and fast—the group decided to establish a project that would combine young people's interest and passion for music (in particular, hip hop) with efforts to solve community problems. That project, Leaders of the New School (LONS), would recruit young people between the ages of 13-19 from Chicago's southwest side to meet and discuss community issues, the importance of civic engagement, and the power of art to inspire social change.

Young people would also receive instruction in hip hop arts and elements from a F.E.W. instructor while continuing to participate in small group discussions, as well as larger dialogues that involved parents, teachers, and community leaders. Life skills and leadership development training would also be part of the process, which would

## LEADERS OF THE NEW SCHOOL

Continues...

**“one of the most important aspects of LONS is the relationships that develop between artist mentors and young people, among the young people themselves, and between young people and their communities—rather than the art, which is “more of a vehicle for the outcome of civic engagement and social change.”**

culminate with participants preparing a hip hop performance reflecting community issues and solutions. The project also created a mutually beneficial working relationship between IMAN, an organization with resources that relies heavily on volunteers, and F.E.W, an artist collective with limited resources looking to engage with young people.

During the MIYO grant award period, 20 young people participated in this multi-faceted effort, which is now expanding to include 35 more young people from south Chicago. The project went beyond just the individual participants, however, reaching more than 400 community residents—parents, educators, religious leaders, and others—who took part in LONS’ activities during the grant year.

Jafri believes that LONS is a model for using art as a means to spur civic engagement, but that will only happen if it becomes financially sustainable—a challenge in these hard economic times. Auspiciously, the first class of young leaders, reflecting their newly honed leadership skills, has committed themselves to take over this task and build LONS so it can reach a wider swath of the community. Jafri calls this a “cascading leadership model”—one in which young people are “determined to make it happen with whatever limited resources they have,” including social media and the Internet.

Jafri points out that one of the most important aspects of LONS is the relationships that develop between artist mentors and young people, among the young people themselves, and between young people and their communities—rather than the art, which is “more of a vehicle for the outcome of civic engagement and social change.” Relationships, however, are admittedly hard to measure, so LONS is documenting its process through a series of performances, visual art projects, and youth-directed documentaries that bring these relationships to life.