

REPORT

Bridging the Divide to Promote Active Citizenship

Wingspread Conference Center

Racine, Wisconsin

November 17-19, 2003

Co-Sponsored by

The Grantmaker Forum on Community & National Service & The Johnson Foundation

The conference, *Bridging the Divide to Promoting Active Citizenship*, took place at the Johnson Foundation's Wingspread Conference Center in Racine, Wisconsin from November 17-19, 2003. The purpose of the conference was to bring together representatives from leading citizenship-building organizations and leaders of philanthropy to develop a common framework for advancing active citizenship. Thirty-six leaders representing nonprofit organizations, public institutions and philanthropy participated in the process and discussion.

The Grantmaker Forum was particularly committed to this discussion for two reasons: to better understand the "field" of active engagement, and to determine the value of and need for an association of philanthropy that would embrace a broad palette of approaches to active engagement.

Background

The source of the *Bridging the Divide to Promoting Active Citizenship* conference was the Grantmaker Forum's 2003 strategic planning process, which had begun with a 2002 report from a comprehensive evaluation of the organization's impact on the field of philanthropy. As the Forum moved forward with its organizational planning, questions arose about how to increase the impact of philanthropy on issues of active citizenship, for example:

- What organizations are currently involved in promoting active engagement?
- How are they already connected with one another?
- What are the possibilities of both collaborative work with existing organizations and finding a unique niche for the Grantmaker Forum?
- Is there a need for an organization within or outside of philanthropy that would bridge the various approaches to active engagement?

Participants

Thirty-six individuals representing philanthropy, nonprofits, government, and academic researchers assembled at Wingspread for the conference. The list of participants is attached to this report.

Advance Papers

The Wingspread Conference brought together funders of active engagement with leaders of organizations that are involved in active engagement in order to explore the commonalities across approaches and the opportunities for new associations and relationships.

As a preface to the conference and to inform the conference discussion, the Grantmaker Forum commissioned six “practitioner papers”, essays by program experts whose daily work is to lead and deliver a program that builds civic engagement. The six practitioners represented service-learning, youth service, civic education, youth development, and military service. The papers were shared with Wingspread participants in advance of the conference.

The Grantmaker Forum also sent conference participants copies of its November ’03 publication *Service to Civics* as a snapshot of how programs currently link service activities with civic outcomes.

Agenda

The conference agenda was designed around four assumptions, which the conference organizers wanted to test with a broader audience:

- First, that active citizenship is a broad construct inclusive of a range of strategies, and that the groups and organizations represented at the conference were all working to promote active citizenship.
- Second, that our nation will be better positioned to solve important public and social problems if we increase the level of civic engagement and encourage active citizenship among a larger segment of our population.
- Third, that we will improve our collective ability to encourage active citizenship if we work more closely together than if we work within the confines of our separate organizational and programmatic identity. For example, the Grantmaker Forum’s identity since its inception in 1993 has been service and volunteering.
- Fourth, that philanthropy could and should be better organized to support active citizenship.

A copy of the final agenda is attached.

Key Issues & Lessons

This is not intended to be a summary of the many discussions at Wingspread but rather a synthesis of the major issues and key questions that emerged.

Lesson #1: There was no consensus across organizations that the ultimate value of their work was in the engagement of community members in community life.

Although all of the organizations represented at Wingspread are involved in active engagement (citizenship), participants had different perspectives on the *ultimate* value of their work. For some, active engagement is specifically a means to what they define as a more important end – for example, social justice. In this way, active engagement is a tactical tool to promote a specific agenda. For far fewer, active engagement is the *ultimate value*—creating engaged and active citizens is a

value in and of itself and is not tied to a particular public policy outcome or social movement agenda.

This was a major lesson. The conference organizers had thought that the goal of active engagement (citizenship) would provide the glue among and across these groups and a good basis for establishing a platform where they could meet, discuss, plan, and organize; in other words, that the conference participants would see themselves operating within the realm of something akin to a “field.” In the discussions it became apparent that the “identity” of many of the organizations is not one of “engagement” per se, but one of engagement in order to address a specific issue, cause or concern. Working within this framework, one person’s engagement would be valued more than another’s.

Lesson #2: Among the groups and organizations actively working to “engage” people in social, political, and community change, the organizational point of view or ideology influences who they “engage,” for how long and to what end.

Most everyone did agree that there is an important connection between engaging people in community life and addressing public problems. The challenge here again is that one’s point of view about what the appropriate solution may be to a public problem may narrow the range of individuals one would seek to “engage,” for how long and to what end. Some organizations apply engagement strategies to advance their change agenda on a specific public problem—attempting to mobilize specific people to take specific action, for example an environmental issue or a health cause. Fewer organizations are working broadly on the goal of increasing engagement in general, so that citizens will become more influential across issues of interest.

Lesson #3: Those doing engagement work value opportunities to talk “across” issues and approaches, despite the points of tension, but have few opportunities to do so.

By the end of the Wingspread Conference it was evident that people appreciated the opportunity to talk “across” issues and approaches—that they found in one another some points of tension but also common passions. The dialogue itself, by raising the issue of “point of view,” demonstrated the benefit of a neutral setting—a place where one’s political perspective would not get in the way of a shared interest in a healthy democracy. It was evident that no organization is attempting to convene in this way, both across approaches and across philanthropy, nonprofits and public institutions.

Many participants expressed appreciation to the Grantmaker Forum for opening up the discussion. The small group discussions on the last day of the event gave rise to specific recommendations for ways in which a new association (of philanthropy) might foster better connections and communication across and among those working on engagement efforts.

Lesson #4: No association within or outside of philanthropy is attempting to bridge the various approaches to engagement (without a point of view). This makes it difficult for both philanthropists and nonprofits to improve their understanding and support of active engagement.

There was significant consensus among those in attendance that an association of philanthropy capable of collecting information, using information to make better philanthropic decisions and keeping people connected would be an asset overall.

Conference participants suggested that they would like to be kept connected, have opportunities to learn about what different organizations are doing with respect to engagement, and what their efforts are accomplishing. Some suggested the need for research on engagement—a landscape of

organizations, both virtual and real, that are attempting to organize and engage citizens in civic and political life. Others offered the idea that a broad-based network of engagement organizations might work together on strategic communications to encourage active engagement. Given the diversity of approaches and interests represented, it would be a challenge to develop specific on-going shared activities.

Wingspread participants expressed appreciation to the Grantmaker Forum for its effort to assess its past impact on philanthropy and imagine a different future. Many appreciated being brought into the conversation, even though they were not previously associated or familiar with the organization.

Most participants agreed that philanthropy could be better organized to support active engagement (citizenship). The Grantmaker Forum collected specific suggestions for a “new” organization, one that would embrace a broad engagement agenda. A list of the suggestions is attached to this report.

Post-conference activities

For the conference sponsors, the Wingspread conversation answered several important questions and raised several new ones. In December 2003 and January 2004 the Grantmaker Forum referred to the Wingspread conference discussions and suggestions in its decision-making about the organization’s future directions.

Acknowledgements

Conference sponsors and organizers

The Johnson Foundation, Chris Beem, Program Officer, Democracy & Community

The Grantmaker Forum on Community & National Service, Jill Blair, Executive Director

Wingspread Conference Center, Linda Stengel, Event Coordinator

Facilitators

Beth Brown, BTW Consultants—*informing change*

Virginia Kellogg, Leadership That Works

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Attachments

Participant List

Conference Agenda

Participant Suggestions

PARTICIPANT LIST

Bridging the Divide to Promote Active Citizenship

Wingspread Conference Center

Racine, Wisconsin

November 17-19, 2003

1. Suzanne Aisenberg Consultant
2. Diana Aviv Independent Sector
3. Ann Baker Piton Foundation
4. Chris Beem The Johnson Foundation
5. Ben Binswanger The Case Foundation
6. AnnMaura Connolly City Year
7. Pamela David Walter and Elise Haas Fund
8. Michael Delli Carpini Annenberg School of Communications
9. Rennie Dutton Points of Light Foundation
10. Ditra Edwards LISTEN, Inc.
11. Ivan Frishberg New Voter's Project & US PIRG
12. Grant Garrison Rockefeller Brothers Fund
13. Chris Gates National Civic League
14. Cindy Gibson Carnegie Corporation of New York
15. Jeff Glebocki The George Gund Foundation
16. Bob Goodwin Points of Light Foundation
17. Col. Rob Gordon Unites States Military Academy
18. Loren Harris The Ford Foundation
19. Liz Hollander Campus Compact
20. Kenny Holdsmann National Service-Learning Partnership
21. Lara Iglitzin Henry M. Jackson Foundation
22. Paul Jellinek Consultant
23. Chris Kwak W.K. Kellogg Foundation
24. Peter Levine Center for Information and Research on Civic Learning & Engagement (CIRCLE)
25. Marc Magee Center for Civic Enterprise
26. Alicia Manning The Lynde and Harry Bradley Foundation, Inc.
27. Jim Marks Greater Milwaukee Foundation
28. Kay Maxwell League of Women Voters
29. Vera Miao Funders Collaborative on Youth Organizing
30. Greg Moore National Voter Fund of the NAACP
31. Bill Schambra The Bradley Center for Philanthropy and Civic Renewal
32. John Sirek McCormick Tribune Foundation
33. Pamela Stevens AOL Time Warner Foundation
34. Barbara Taylor Corporation for National & Community Service
35. Tobi Walker The Pew Charitable Trusts
36. Jill Blair The Grantmaker Forum on Community & National Service

Bridging the Divide to Promote Active Citizenship

A Wingspread Conference
November 17-19, 2003
Racine, Wisconsin

Presented by the Grantmaker Forum on Community & National Service
and
The Johnson Foundation

AGENDA

Conference Purpose: To bring together representatives from leading citizenship-building organizations and leaders of philanthropy to develop a common framework for advancing active citizenship.

MONDAY, NOVEMBER 17

- 4:30 p.m.** **Welcome to Wingspread and Conference “Charge”**
Chris Beem, Program Officer—Democracy and Community, The Johnson Foundation

Lara Iglitzin, President, Henry M. Jackson Foundation and Chair, Grantmaker Forum on Community and National Service
- 5:00 p.m.** **Back to Our Roots—Common Grounding and History**
Virginia Kellogg and Beth Brown, Conference Facilitators
- During this opening session, we will share and reflect upon our individual and organizational experiences in promoting active citizenship in order to establish a common perspective for our work together throughout the conference.
- 6:30 p.m.** **Hospitality**
- 7:00 p.m.** **Dinner**
- 8:00 p.m.** **Adjourn**

Evening hospitality will be available in the Living Room of the Guest House.

TUESDAY, NOVEMBER 18

6:30-8:15 a.m. Breakfast will be available in the Living Room of the Guest House

8:30 a.m. **The Faces of Active Citizenship—Inspiration and Discussion**
Michael Delli Carpini, Dean of the Annenberg School of Communications, University of Pennsylvania

Diana Aviv, President and CEO, Independent Sector

Who are we talking about when we speak of “active citizens?” What do we need to do as a society to support active citizens? Michael Delli Carpini will launch our day by addressing these questions. Diana Aviv will respond to Michael’s comments, kicking off a discussion by the full group.

10:00 a.m. **Break**

10:30 a.m. **Mapping Active Citizenship
Small Group Discussions**

In this session, small groups will begin to “map” the landscape of active citizenship organizations. The purpose of this exercise is to identify all the different organizations that are working on the various aspects of active citizenship, reveal where they are collaborating successfully and identify opportunities for future collaboration. The goal of this discussion is to consider ways to expand our networks beyond our specific areas of expertise and interest in order to maximize our impact.

Noon **Hospitality**

12:15 p.m. **Lunch**

1:15 p.m. **Sharing the Vision**

We will capture the common themes from the small group discussion and create a shared vision of both the current and the potential map of active citizenship organizations.

2:15 p.m. **Collaborating for Public Problem Solving: Testing a Theory
Small Group Discussions**

We will take the ideas generated in the morning and test them against an on-the-ground example in order to explore the practical implications of the vision we’ve created.

3:30 p.m. **Break**

3:45 p.m. Working Together for Change

The purpose of this session is to debrief the small group work and to begin to answer the question that is the foundation of this conference—Is the whole greater than the sum of its parts? Meaning, in this case, is the value of working together to address public problems greater than addressing the issues through separate “silos” of national service, volunteerism, civic engagement, etc?

5:00 p.m. Break

6:30 p.m. Hospitality

7:00 p.m. Dinner

8:00 p.m. Adjourn

Evening hospitality will be available in the Living Room of the Guest House

WEDNESDAY, NOVEMBER 19

6:30-8:45 a.m. Breakfast will be available in the Living Room of the Guest House.

9:00 a.m. Destination Check

We will spent the first few minutes of the day reviewing the last two days of work and the important goals for the morning and beyond.

9:30 a.m. Contributing to Active Citizenship -- Small Group Discussions

As we near the end of the conference, we will consider ways to position philanthropy to be a more effective contributor to active citizenship through funding and beyond.

10:30 a.m. Break

10:45 a.m. Small Group Report Outs and Discussion

11:30 a.m. Final Reflections and Commitments

We will share our personal reflections about the experience of the past two days and discuss opportunities for continued work together.

12:30 p.m. Lunch

1:30 p.m. Adjourn

WHAT SHOULD THE GRANTMAKER FORUM DO?

Suggestions from Wingspread Conference Discussions
November 19-21, 2003

- Convene meetings around active engagement
- Take the lead on strategic communications around active engagement (a public education campaign)
- Be a neutral ground for liberals and conservatives to find their common commitment to engagement as a bedrock of a healthy democracy
- Help to increase funding by foundations to active engagement efforts
- Serve as a clearing house for information on engagement strategies
- Provide a link to and among other active engagement organizations (notwithstanding point of view)
- Establish a collaborative fund for innovative approaches to engagement
- Be a source of information about promising practices
- Sponsor research on active citizenship