



TALKING VALUES

Soulful Conversations within Community Economic Development



GREETINGS



NACEDA is the National Alliance of Community Economic Development Associations. We're an alliance of 40 state and regional associations for community development in 25 states and the District of Columbia. NACEDA exists because our members believe that a strong, unified community development field leads to stronger, healthier, more prosperous communities for the people who live and work there.

But how do you unify a field with people representing different places, each of whom come to this work with their own histories, experiences, and opinions? For me, the way to do this is to provide the space and opportunity for people concerned about the communities we live in to share ideas, discuss challenges, identify problems and, when possible, agree to a common approach.

NACEDA already does this in many different ways, from its regional membership convenings to its larger summits. And therefore it's natural that, when the Board of Directors commissioned a publication, the result is yet another platform for conversation. *Talking Values: Soulful Conversations within Community Economic Development* provides a new space for conversation. Its unique format of essays and responses (written or otherwise) is an entirely fitting way to commemorate NACEDA's 10th Anniversary.

The essays you will read address five broad questions:

1. How can NACEDA members support organizing and community empowerment efforts by local community-based organizations?
2. How can our field achieve scale while maintaining accountability to local community?
3. How can community development relate to the broader goals of racial equity?
4. Does community development connote a specific mode of practice? And is the term "community development" still useful to audiences external to our field?
5. How will a new generation of leadership change our field?

As you will see, these questions garnered many different opinions and responses. And while these different opinions can sometimes be challenging, each voice is unique and authentic and energizing. The essays and responses contained here reflect who we are – or want to be – as a field of individuals and organizations committed to improving places and lives.

We hope you will find the content in *Talking Values* to be not only helpful and engaging, but also thought provoking and maybe even provocative. NACEDA intentionally sought to reflect the diverse opinions that exist within the community economic development field and to challenge ourselves to consider new ideas and voices.

That said, the diverse opinions reflected are a sampling. The release of this publication is the start of a conversation, not a definitive end. Like community development itself, NACEDA intends for *Talking Values* to evolve conceptually and spur further thought, which is why we have included a discussion guide to help us engage peers and take a deeper dive into these key questions.

We greatly appreciate Cathy Niederberger and PNC Bank for their generous support of *Talking Values*. We also want to thank Harold Simon and Miriam Axel-Lute of *Shelterforce Magazine* for guiding content and format, and Joe McNeely for serving as the publication chair.

Finally, thank you for joining us as we journey into the future, using these questions and responses as guideposts.

Sharon Legenza

Chair, NACEDA Board of Directors
Executive Director, Housing Action Illinois

FOREWORD

By Joe McNeely



THE SOUL OF COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT

Over almost 50 years, I have come to think of our field, less as a uniform body of organizations, and more as a parade in which diverse organizations with different agendas, practices, and origins march behind

the same banner, a banner, often in a common public policy demand for public investment. We are, mostly, place-based organizations focused on housing and other real estate as a platform for family resilience and economically-sustainable community revitalization. We who march pursue a variety of social, grant-funded programs, but at the core of our organizations is work that uses private-sector techniques and attracts private investors to places the market economy would otherwise refuse to put resources.

For some of us, community economic development is an extension of the long struggle for racial justice, or another method of community empowerment whereby residents learn by action and reflection and become more capable of driving social change. For many of us, community economic development is a *process* by which residents direct revitalization in a manner that benefits the residents of that community, particularly the most challenged.

This parade of organizational diversity defies neat delineation. We are more like a field of practice, like medicine, that flourishes in many different institutions and expressions.

The issues presented in these essays are not new — nor are they simple questions with clear answers. Rather, these are enduring conflicts that require us to continuously re-balance the values of the field. This necessary and dynamic process gives creativity and juice to our work. Each generation has, and will need to, determine their own reflections to these questions.

How can we be “a field of practice,” if we are so diverse in origin, structure and operation; so diffuse in our programming i.e., comprehensive; so universal in our presence, urban, suburban and rural? What do we all truly have in common? How do you tell your mother what you do?

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How can we use private-sector techniques and recruit private investment without, for the sake of feasibility, falling into the inequities inherent in a capitalistic economy? How can we be bedfellows with those institutions responsible for the very disinvestment at the heart of what we struggle against?

“How can we change the world without losing our soul?”

How can we be about racial equity and yet keep the relationships that benefit our communities with conventional institutions that harbor structural racism? How can we be about empowerment, organizing the disenfranchised for power, yet be known best for producing real estate projects with highly-leveraged private financing?

How can we be grassroots enough to be accessible and accountable to all community residents, yet be professional and sophisticated enough to change the intractable conditions that confine those we seek to involve and benefit?

How can we be an industry, and yet a movement? How can we be real estate professionals, yet have the soul of a reformer?

How can we change the world without losing our soul?

These are, at the core, *soulful* questions. They are less about the mechanisms we use, or the work we do, than about the motivation and rationale for why we do it.

They are less about production and outcome-oriented funding, than they are about the values and vision of a future that gets us out of bed in the morning.

Five authors attempted to challenge our soulful reflection on who we are and what we are about. Indeed, what we most have in common across this big parade is *what motivates us*. These authors, many from “the next generation” and deliberately diverse, ask us how we define and describe ourselves.

If I had one admonition from the past to the future, it would be this: keep these values, especially empowerment, social change and racial justice, ever in the forefront of your mind and let them infuse and modify every element of your practice. My generation has, at times, let this slip.

Do not allow these values to be shelved into a strategic plan that gets revisited once a year — or written about in a once-in-a-decade publication. Do not let them become siloed into a “program” apart from other programs of your organization. Let them influence the very means by which you do every part of your organization’s work. Challenge racist institutions *while doing* project development. As part of participation in planning, teach people who are not technicians to understand real estate feasibility so that they support your project *and* have better insight into the economic realities that confine their families and cause disinvestment. Yes, employ young people in your construction projects. But take time to show them how real estate development works and who really makes the money.

Be the best at the programmatic techniques of your work, but also be the visionary, the reformer. Because in this parade, the beat is not set by national leaders, program officers, or politicians banging a drum. The beat is set by soulful practitioners.

Joe McNeely served as executive director of a CDC in Baltimore that was generated by a community organization and funded by the Ford Foundation’s original CDC program. Joe then served under President Carter as director of HUD’s Office of Neighborhoods which funded the further expansion of neighborhood revitalization organizations into community economic development, sometimes called “the second wave of CDCs.” From 1982 to 2004, during a period of the field’s rapid growth, diversification and professionalization, Joe led the Development Training Institute (DTI), identified as “the country’s most successful CDC leadership program.” Joe subsequently served as executive director of the highly regarded Central Baltimore Partnership, and has served on NACEDA’s board of directors since the organization’s founding. He is author, most recently, of Community Economic Development for Social Workers, a textbook published by Columbia University Press.



How can NACEDA members support organizing and community empowerment efforts by local community-based organizations?

Photo: Legislators in the state of Washington hear directly from constituents who need safe, affordable homes and thriving communities. Photo courtesy of the Washington Low Income Housing Alliance.

WHY WE MUST PRIORITIZE COMMUNITY ORGANIZERS' NEEDS



By Tamara Holmes

IN CONVERSATION WITH THESE NACEDA MEMBERS:

Rachael Myers *Washington Low Income Housing Alliance*

Gloria Bruce *East Bay Housing Organizations*

Sarida Scott *Community Development Advocates of Detroit*

Staci Berger *Housing & Community Development Network of New Jersey*

John Paul Shaffer *BLDG Memphis*

Community development can transform neighborhoods and enhance lives. It creates opportunities for people who have been historically underserved, and those who suffer from discrimination and disinvestment. However, if community residents aren't part of the community development process, they may continue to be overlooked, their greatest needs may remain unmet, and any efforts to effect change may be less successful. A vibrant organizing ecosystem can spark community involvement, particularly during times of political and social uncertainty. For that reason, community development networks should find ways to increase their support of organizers – even when they have little control over where those organizing efforts might lead.

"We know what we need to do to address community needs. What's lacking isn't good policy," says Rachael Myers, executive director of Washington Low Income Housing Alliance. "What's lacking is the political will to fund it and to implement it, and you can't achieve that without community organizing. You've got to have the grassroots base making a lot of noise."

While NACEDA members are typically a step removed from on-the-ground community organizing efforts, they play an active role in providing training, funding, and support to organizers. Yet, when community empowerment is done right, there is a cost. Once a community is organized, NACEDA members relinquish control over what issues organizers choose to rally around. That loss of control is a

reality that NACEDA members must embrace, particularly in a divisive socio-political climate where organizing is more important than ever.

THE ART OF LETTING GO

It's easy to see why a community development network might hesitate to embrace community organizing efforts wholeheartedly. While organizing can create buy-in and engagement from the community, there's no guarantee that the community's goals will align with broader policy goals. When people experience the power that effective organizing can yield, they may decide to use that power to further their own goals, some of which may be counter to NACEDA members' goals.

The Washington alliance understands this dilemma all too well. They spearhead the Resident Action Project (RAP) a statewide network of people in Washington state who have experienced housing injustice first-hand and organize against it. A lot of the alliance's organizational members are housing providers, and some were initially uneasy about RAP's work, Myers says.

"There is some fear about what it means to have your tenants be organized," says Myers. What if those tenants organize against you? Is your support of organizers also serving to undermine your community development efforts or make your job more difficult?

While those concerns are not unfounded, now is the

time to put those fears aside. The need for organizing and the changes it can inspire far outweigh the chance that organizers will turn against community development organizations. Societal threats to community development are too great.

THE BIGGER THREAT

Anyone doubting the need for community organizing need only pick up a newspaper, catch an hour of cable news, or spend a few minutes on Twitter. Under the Trump administration, new and proposed policies could impact federal funding for community development, as well as the economic health and emotional well-being of the vulnerable communities that NACEDA members serve. “We used to have national leadership that would say, ‘We have to support and lift up everyone in this country.’ Now we have national leadership that explicitly says, ‘We really don’t care if people are left behind and, in fact, we would prefer it if certain people were excluded,’” says Gloria Bruce, executive director of the East Bay Housing Organizations (EBHO) in Oakland, California.

For that reason, community organizing efforts are more important to the success of community development than ever. When people in a community are systematically denied certain rights and resources, the only power they have is in their numbers, says Sarida Scott, executive director of Community Development Advocates of Detroit. When people organize and speak in a collective voice, their actions can influence public opinion and lawmakers.

“You’ve got to have the grassroots base making a lot of noise.”

When it comes to some of the actions of the Trump administration, such as its zero-tolerance immigration policy, some see organizing as the best possible deterrent. “I’m sitting here in Oakland, California, and I think there are many places like this that have built up a very strong local grassroots community organizing movement that is not taking this stuff quietly,” Bruce says. “I think there is organizing power and energy and even sometimes local political clout that was not there in previous eras of deep exclusion.”

At the same time, some communities are so afraid to speak up for themselves that they need organizers to rally others to speak up for them. Bruce recalls a partner organization that services the Latino community lamenting that deportation fears made it more difficult to get people to come out to rallies this year.

Gordon Chin, founding executive director of the Chinatown Community Development Center, wrote last year in an article for *Shelterforce* that community organizing is a way for community development organizations to think “less like an ‘industry’ and more like a movement,” which is necessary during the Trump Era.¹ So, the question remains: How can NACEDA members strengthen their existing connections to the organizing community and help create an ecosystem where organizing for community empowerment thrives? Being willing to cede control of the outcome and put organizers’ needs first is a big part of the answer.

A NEW GENERATION OF ORGANIZERS

Organizing is a very specific and skill-driven process, says Scott. NACEDA members can help community groups and energized residents learn some of these skills, even though they can’t control how those skills will eventually be used. Network leaders are in a unique position to elevate the organizing community and help organizers achieve more than they might have thought possible.

For the last four years, EBHO has held a Leadership Academy for current residents of affordable housing. “We do a series of trainings and workshops over the course of a couple of months and we emphasize things like the basics of community organizing, the different models and what you can do to get people out,” Bruce says. When senior residents needed a new stop sign to prevent accidents at a dangerous intersection, EBHO showed them how to organize an effective letter-writing campaign and escalate the issue.

NACEDA members can also spearhead training around current community threats. “Last year, after the Trump administration made it clear that it was going to focus on employing policies against immigrants, a lot of our members who work in those communities and serve that population of undocumented residents were on the front

¹ Chin, G. (2017, July 17). *Trump Era a Time to Build Power, Not Buildings*. *Shelterforce* (Summer 2017). Retrieved from: <https://shelterforce.org/2017/07/18/time-different-message-cdcs-trump-administration/>

lines of that struggle,” says Staci Berger, president and CEO of the Housing & Community Development Network of New Jersey. “We were able to facilitate a conversation among our members and we put together a webinar for them with the Alliance for Immigrant Justice.”

“We both lead and follow to support each other.”

NACEDA members can also expose their members to the most knowledgeable experts in organizing, in person and via webinars and conference calls. For example, the New Jersey network brought in staff from Midwest Academy, a training school for progressive organizers, for a five-day training session.

NACEDA members can use their clout to provide local organizers with media exposure. When the New Jersey network found out that several towns had high rates of childhood lead poisoning, they organized a series of press conferences in conjunction with local groups and created buzz about local organizing efforts via social media.

Then there is logistics support. BLDG Memphis helps smaller organizing efforts in the community get off the ground through its Mobile Porch, which is literally a front porch built on a trailer that can be hauled around to fairs, festivals, and community events. Community groups can use it to mobilize residents to become invested in an important issue. Not only does it serve as an attention-getter, but it has built-in tools, such as tablets, that let groups conduct surveys or capture video and photos.

“Giving people a sense of their own power and making sure they understand that legislators have an obligation to at least hear them out is a very powerful thing, particularly for folks who are doing it for the first time,” Berger says.

BUILDING COALITIONS OF ORGANIZERS

Another way NACEDA members can strengthen the organizing community is by building community alliances. “We do a lot of coalition work,” says Bruce. However, “a lot of the community-based organizations or organizers I know really don’t like being approached

with solutions that are already figured out for them,” Bruce notes. Instead, they may be open to a conversation about how NACEDA members can help them reach a goal they’ve already set.

For example, a NACEDA member might share information about how affordable housing is funded with a tenants-rights group, Bruce says. “Let them know ‘we’re here to give you some information but we want to learn from you, as well.’” Over time, those relationships can lead to further collaborations. “It took us a couple of years to show organizers that we were for real and that we cared deeply about low-income people,” Bruce says. “We totally have that cred now.”

It’s also important to make sure a local organization’s organizing style is compatible with a NACEDA member’s mission. For example, EBHO’s Interfaith Communities United program uses faith-rooted organizing to develop relationships with interfaith and inter-religious organizations and mobilize church members to advocate for housing justice.

BLDG Memphis’ role is to be a convener for smaller, local community-based organizations, says Executive Director John Paul Shaffer. They can also provide infrastructure and an administrative backbone. Funders want to know that there’s a history and a track record for community-based efforts and BLDG Memphis can provide that track record when it partners with local groups who are doing organizing on the ground, Shaffer says.

One way they’ve done that is through their participation in the Strong, Prosperous, And Resilient Communities Challenge (SPARCC), a three-year initiative to invest \$90 million in community organizing efforts. BLDG Memphis is involved determining what types of local community projects and organizing efforts SPARCC will fund.

FROM ORGANIZING TO MOBILIZING

Not only are NACEDA members supporting local organizing efforts, some are moving into the role of mobilization – taking the lead in bringing people together to initiate change that may or may not have been decided with community input.

There’s a place for both organizing and mobilizing, Bruce says. “NACEDA member organizations would have to have a strong relationship already with groups to go and say, ‘Hey, we know you have a base of folks that you organize.

This is something that they might care about. Can we sit down and talk about how we might mobilize together?”

Berger agrees, pointing to efforts that the New Jersey network made to get local community groups to support efforts to fight lead poisoning. “It’s the kind of thing where we both lead and follow to support each other.”

Some NACEDA members are adding community organizers to their staffs. Bruce has two full-time organizers and Scott is contemplating hiring the organization’s first organizer. Funding may be a challenge for NACEDA members who are increasing their organizing efforts. If they spend more money on organizing, they must take money from somewhere else. To keep costs down, Scott is considering sharing the organizer she wants to hire with a partner organization to split the salary costs.

REAPING THE REWARDS OF ORGANIZING

A big part of supporting community organizing efforts is showcasing success stories – something NACEDA members are particularly well-suited to do. Networks can tout members’ community wins via social media or highlight organizing efforts that have affected change at their membership meetings. The New Jersey network, like many NACEDA members, showcases ways that members are supporting local organizing efforts in their newsletter, website, and social media.

“Our objective is to help people learn from each other,” says Berger. When community development organizations see other organizations just like their own successfully engaging residents and standing up for the values they believe in, it fosters new ideas for bringing other organizing efforts to life.

That’s how the Washington alliance convinced its members that organizing tenants is a good thing despite the fact that doing so creates uncertainty. They highlighted examples of how empowering tenants has helped to push their public policy agenda. They showed

that when the residents win, the housing providers win. At the same time, a strong organizing community can serve as a check to help community development organizations stay true to the mission of making life better for the communities they serve. “If one of our members has bad practices that are harming their tenants and their tenants organize after they’ve learned skills through our program, then more power to them,” Myers says.

If a community development organization can’t get past their fear of organizing, they must at least put that fear on the back burner and focus on what can be accomplished through an empowered community. Organizers can help NACEDA members strengthen their own advocacy positions.

This year, East Bay Housing Organizations is advocating for a ballot measure that would put more money in California’s state budget for affordable housing. Bruce is looking to Leadership Academy participants to support their efforts. “We’re hoping that because of the training they’ve had, they’ll feel confident in how they can talk about policy issues and they will be ambassadors and volunteers to spread the word on this campaign,” she says.

Organizing has the potential to shape the political discourse and lift up the field of community development – if community members are given the spark of support they need and the freedom to use it in any way they see fit. By putting the needs of organizers first, community development organizations can unleash one of their biggest weapons against socio-political threats to the field. “We’re helping people to organize because we believe in the same things,” says Myers. “We’re all on the same team.”

Tamara Holmes is a Washington, DC-based freelance journalist and ghostwriter who writes about community development, money and small business. Her work has appeared in Shelterforce, USA Today, and AARP Bulletin.

- ▶ **Has professionalizing the real estate development aspect of our field forced us to sacrifice a commitment to organizing?**
- ▶ **How can advocates balance a need to mobilize on specific issues vs. longer-term, community-oriented organizing?**
- ▶ **How could we use the work we're doing on real estate development to mobilize and empower community residents?**

RESPONSE #1***Commit to a Culture of Organizing***

By Pam Bender

Wow! It was so exciting to read in Tamara Holmes' essay about the many different ways CDC associations are supporting and encouraging community organizing. Here at the Massachusetts Association of CDCs (MACDC) we are continuously trying to improve the ways we support the organizing our members do and help members who don't do it begin to organize.

MACDC recently went through a strategic planning process in which we identified "building the power and voice of lower income people and people of color to shape the future of their communities and their own lives" as one of our organization's priorities. This means that MACDC will have to help our members embrace community organizing and commit financial and human resources to organizing.

I know that it's hard to find funding for organizing work – but it's not impossible. When I first began working at MACDC, our members constantly asked me "How do other CDCs find the money for organizers?" When I asked Joe Kriesberg, our director, he let me in on the secret. "The secret to funding organizing is there's no secret. The CDCs who are committed to doing it, put it into their budget and fund it."

Committing to organizing and making it a priority is key. During our strategic planning process, MACDC convened a task force of organizers and executive directors from CDCs who do organizing. This group recommended launching a working group to take a deep dive look at the state of organizing in the CDC sector and how it can be strengthened. We already regularly convene a peer group of CDC organizers so that they can learn from and support each other and provide organizing trainings through our Mel King Institute. But we want to take those efforts to the next level.

Most importantly we want to create a "culture of organizing" within MACDC; an organizational culture in which organizing is valued and expected. We want to work to make community organizing and community leadership development holistically integrated into our members' structures. The CDCs that do that tend to be the most successful. And as Tamara pointed out, sharing success stories is important – the first step in making a commitment to organizing is learning how it will make a CDC stronger.

Pam Bender is senior organizer for the Massachusetts Association of Community Development Corporations.

RESPONSE #2***Three Quick Thoughts on Organizing***

By Danny LeBlanc

I've spent about half my 40-year career working in organizations that only did community organizing, and the other half working for CDCs that included community organizing as part of their practice. Based on that experience I humbly offer three thoughts to add to this discussion:

1. All organizing is about identifying and training community leaders, and empowering them to make decisions, set strategy, and take action on those things they determine to be important in their community. As community development practitioners, we should be as rigorous about the work of training and developing community leaders – including establishing and using measures for that work's effectiveness – as we are about our bricks and mortar and service delivery work.
2. One concrete measure of a CDC's willingness to engage in real community organizing is whether the CDC is willing to take on and lead efforts that are not necessarily in the immediate business interest of the CDC, but are important to the community's overall development. An example of this would be a CDC's willingness to help organize a campaign for an Inclusionary Housing zoning ordinance to create affordable housing, rather than only organizing residents in support of the CDC's own affordable housing developments.
3. We can all learn a lot from both past and current experience. At the Massachusetts Association of Community Development Corporations (MACDC), we have the rich history of having run the Ricanne Hadrian Initiative for Community Organizing (RHICO) for a decade beginning in 1997. (I am a board member of MACDC and helped establish RHICO.) RHICO helped change the CDC culture in Massachusetts and provided training and early organizing experience to dozens of young organizers. At MACDC, we're about to take a fresh look at the state of community organizing practice among our CDCs – it's that important to our work – and we would implore our fellow CDC associations to do the same.

Danny LeBlanc is CEO of the Somerville Community Corporation in Somerville, Massachusetts.

RESPONSE #3***Organizing to Build Neighborhood Power*****By Aaron Goodman**

My inspiration for joining the world of community development is that it started as a movement: residents and neighbors organizing to take control of the future of their communities. The field of community development has made vast strides over the decades in the technical know-how and capacity both to do “bricks and mortar” development and to deliver impactful services to their communities where it is so badly needed.

However, without a deep connection to their local communities and commitment to organizing and activating residents to seize their power as change makers in neighborhoods, community development is only partially fulfilling its mandate. In the current political and social landscape, we must be more than just non-profit real estate developers. It is of urgent necessity that community development (re)claim the mantle of building resident and neighborhood power.

Detroit has a long and storied tradition of activism and organizing to achieve landmark progress in civil, human and labor rights. However, in the current environment there is a marked separation between community development organizations (CDOs) that work in specific neighborhoods and the grassroots advocacy and organizing groups working citywide on issue campaigns around housing, poverty, democratic participation and inequitable development.

This is not uniformly true for every CDO and neighborhood group, but many put their energy towards working within the current power structure to push incremental change and focus on physical development – rather than building and training a base of organized residents. CDOs in Detroit are rarely the vehicle for turning out residents for public comment at City Council meetings or to lead public campaigns for policy change.

There can be many explanations for this. Organizing isn't easy and requires specific skills and approaches to the work. Most CDOs are already overworked, under-resourced and lack capacity to add community organizing as a core activity. There can also be a reluctance to being confrontational, or seen as adversarial or too “radical” to government officials, funders, and corporate partners on whom CDOs rely to advance their mission.

Additionally, many practitioners have become more comfortable framing their work in terms of community engagement rather than organizing. That's not to knock engagement – I love good engagement, it's in my job title. But we should also know the difference between engagement and organizing. Let's recognize the limitations of an engagement model as the foundation for building power.

CDC associations can and do play an important role in supporting advocacy and organizing on behalf of their members. CDAD regularly provides resources on policy issues at the local, state, and federal level, participates in coalitions advocating on a range of issues affecting our members, and connects our members to larger movements for social justice and equity both local and national. We also play an important role in being able to step out and advocate on issues on behalf of our membership and are willing to weather more political blowback than our individual members.

However, by our nature we are also a step removed from grassroots organizing with residents. We can organize our members around issues and have an impact – but systematic change for just and equitable development requires developing a broader base of residents beyond CDO and neighborhood group leaders. That is what local CDOs could do. Our members already have the connections and relationships with residents that are necessary for building power.

The question I'm grappling with is this. How can CDC associations help to shift their perspective about their role in organizing and building up residents to lead and drive change? City-wide issue advocacy groups don't often have the same kind of long-term relationships and trust with residents as a neighborhood-based organization.

Local CDOs have a great opportunity to connect their residents to the issues and policies that affect their daily lives and then activate them into a force that elected officials and decision makers ignore at their own peril. And CDC associations should orient their work to support local CDO organizing capacity and efforts.

Aaron Goodman is community engagement manager for the Community Development Advocates of Detroit (CDAD).



SCALE & ACCOUNTABILITY

How can our field achieve scale while maintaining accountability to local community?

Photo: CDCs are combining forces to increase scale and capacity while retaining their distinct identity and control through a new type of merger with OppCo. Photo courtesy of The Neighborhood Developers."Housing Alliance.

CAN OUR FIELD ACHIEVE SCALE AND LOCAL ACCOUNTABILITY?



By James A. Anderson

IN CONVERSATION WITH THESE NACEDA MEMBERS AND STAKEHOLDERS:

Joe Kriesberg *Massachusetts Association of Community Development Corporations*

Bernie Mazyck *South Carolina Association for Community Economic Development*

Marty Kooistra *Housing Development Consortium of Seattle-King County*

Ann Houston and Nancy Turner *OppCo, a partnership set up by two CDCs*

Todd Swanstrom and Karl Guenther *Community Builders Network of Metro St. Louis*

Community development corporations (CDCs) were born a half-century ago out of community-based, grassroots advocacy. They have tackled affordable housing, but also issues from economic and small business development to healthcare – all to uplift communities. Indeed, the “c” for “community” signifies a commitment to people and neighborhoods. This commitment has helped CDCs stand apart from other initiatives. That direct connection to people and groups is essentially CDCs’ “brand” and the key to accomplishments to date.

For all of their success, CDCs now face formidable challenges. Economic inequity is growing. Housing shortfalls in many areas are squeezing disadvantaged communities. CDCs not only worry that funding could shrink, but now face competition from new nonprofits as well as private-sector housing companies. And to top it all off, the very work of raising money and tackling housing and other problems is becoming more and more complex.

The watchword NACEDA members hear in connection to the current state of CDCs is “scale.” In today’s environment, does it make sense for CDCs to “scale-up”, i.e. merge, combine efforts, or outsource back-office functions in order to streamline operations and make the most of finite resources? At the same time, does scale pose a threat to CDCs’ core, community-anchored mission? And perhaps most importantly, can CDCs achieve efficient scale while retaining a strong, community-centered focus?

Q: WHEN WE TALK ABOUT SCALE, JUST WHAT’S AT STAKE?

Todd Swanstrom: There’s sometimes a romanticizing of smallness, but small is no good if you don’t have capacity to bring about results. City governments tend to get cynical about working with organizations that don’t have money and adequate staff.

Joe Kriesberg: At the same time, there is no substitute for local engagement and building trust. If we don’t have local CDCs with deep roots, then nonprofit developers need to partner with local groups that do. In some communities, this can work well because there are strong local leaders with whom to partner. But in other places, the absence of a CDC may very well mean the absence of the local leadership needed to engage residents, conceptualize a vision, drive the process, and steward the outcome.

Right now, the field is exploding with innovative new ideas on how to maximize scale and impact while maintaining local community engagement. Yes, it is hard. Yes, there will be failures. Yes, there will be compromises. But folks are trying. They are taking risks. They are thinking creatively.

Q: BUT ISN'T THERE A REAL RISK OF LEAVING COMMUNITIES AND NEIGHBORHOODS BEHIND IN THE QUEST TO SCALE UP?

Joe Kriesberg: We should promote both scaling up and community involvement. In fact, there may be systems or programs that can be designed that help us scale community engagement from centralized training programs, to regional or statewide campaigns, to mentoring and coaching of organizers. Our association doesn't have a lot of direct leverage on CDCs, but we can facilitate conversations and use the bully pulpit to encourage and celebrate people who take risks. Ultimately, there is not one solution – there are solutions. We should support and celebrate a wide variety and create a space where it's okay to fail.

Ann Houston: What we sometimes see in mergers is that as soon as assets move from a specific CDC to a new organization, money talks louder than grassroots and the local community loses control. How do you retain local control, real local direction, and remain rooted in a community on the one hand and have enough scale and capacity in certain key issues, such as back office lines, which allow you to do increasingly complex work? That's the perennial problem.

Q: WHAT FACTORS HELP YOU TO DEFINE SCALE?

Marty Kooistra: In Seattle, we're up against a hot market on steroids. Our board chair opened our 2016 retreat by saying that our best work and performance is not coming close to addressing the need before us. To put this in perspective, in King County today we need 154,000 units to house those who are homeless and cost- and severely-cost-burdened. Project the trends out to 2040 and the gap is 244,000 units. My current mission with the King County Affordable Housing Task Force is to remind everyone that we need to be willing to recognize that technical fixes aren't going to have enough impact. We need to embrace the wicked problem as an adaptive challenge of which none of us has the answer.

“Small is no good if you don't have capacity to bring about results.”

Bernie Mazyck: In South Carolina, meaningful scale for our association is filling gaps in services, resources, and capacity. Some organizations in the state do phenomenal things, but roughly 15% to 20% of our network of CDCs and CDFIs are high performing – that is developing a decent volume of housing units, new construction, home ownership or rentals, accomplishing consistent workforce development, micro-enterprise development, or community lending.

We're in a conservative state that doesn't have a history of community development or deep infrastructures of programs and allies. We don't get much policy support at the local and state level. We even have to use different language to make our case with policy makers. We can't say we're helping poor people. Instead, we have to talk about workforce development, job creation, and return on investment. And we want to secure funds before they wither on the vine.

Karl Guenther: A question that doesn't get asked a lot is how to define an environment that enables scale. St. Louis is a slow-growth city in an older industrial region in the Midwest, an urban area that has both issues of affordability and a need to rebuild its housing market. There's not a lot of individual wealth and the region has weak ties to national philanthropies, and almost no connections to large foundations.

Q: IT SOUNDS AS IF YOU HAVE NO CHOICE BUT TO TAKE ON SYSTEMIC SCALE.

Karl Guenther: Community Builders Network spearheaded a task force to draw up a roadmap for a community investment system. We invited banks and funders together and got conversations started locally about what an effort would look like over the next 10 to 20 years – this all before the time came for fundraising. The direct result is INVESTL, that gathered \$700,000 in funding from 15 banks and four foundations.

Marty Kooistra: In Seattle, we have to contend with nonprofit members and public funders who believe that we can get the type of exponential output that will make a difference by simply putting more resources in the same function box. To reach the level of need requires an unprecedented scale that would dictate totally different approaches rather than incremental tweaks to the way we work.

So, we've looked to stretch by building systemic scale too, while staying focused on the bigger picture. We wrestled with to work that out in connection with the Seattle Housing Affordability and Livability Agenda or HALA. We knew we needed to set a new affordable housing production goal that was "of-scale" – 50,000 new units in 10 years, 20,000 of which would be income and rent restricted. That requires a tripling of our current production which, by the way, is already double of that of San Francisco.

Q: HOW CAN COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT ASSOCIATIONS WEIGH IN ON SCALE AND ACCOUNTABILITY?

Joe Kriesberg: We can use policy to hold groups accountable to high standards without telling them what to do. In Massachusetts, we created the Community Investment Tax Credit program to drive private resources to high-performing groups that meaningfully engage the community AND produce impact.

Here's how it works. CDCs submit 15- to 18-page "community investment plans" that detail how they engaged the community to develop a strategy for their organization and then lay out the strategy and their capacity to execute and evaluate. Twenty percent of the score is based on the quality of the community engagement process. Once CDCs are selected, they can provide donors with a 50% donation tax credit. This helps them raise more private, flexible money to implement their community-driven agenda.

The program has increased from \$4.7 million in its first year to nearly \$11 million in funding for CDCs statewide. The legislature just approved legislation to double the program thanks to a policy campaign led by our association. This is one way we are seeking to help our members scale their impact, scale their resources, scale their partnerships, scale their supporters AND scale their community engagement efforts. We designed the

program this way so that resources would flow to CDCs that can effectively engage the community, articulate their value to the public sector, and secure donations from private funders. In our experience, CDCs that do those three things well are the most effective CDCs.

"The only way we secure the policies, programs and dollars we need to truly scale up is to build political power."

Bernie Mazyck: One of our approaches is to backstop local organizations and create opportunities for local connections to larger programs. The key is to have an organization on the ground that can do outreach, engaging local residents, setting up workshops, and providing follow up.

An example is one of our member organizations which works specifically with land owners who are land rich and cash poor. Many are African American, own a plot of maybe 30 acres of undeveloped, unproductive land. As an intermediary, we've forged a link between our member and a USDA program to reimburse landowners for the costs of reforestation to harvest timber, or for growing produce or vegetables. We're only in the first year of the contract – a \$50,000 partnership – which can grow and renew if we continue.

Q: HOW VIABLE ARE CDC MERGERS AS AN OPTION?

Todd Swanstrom: Mergers can put organizations on much better fiscal footing and a more diverse funding base whereby they are no longer dependent on block grants. In the case of the Tower Grove neighborhood, a CDC merger created an organization with much more political autonomy. Previously, the boundaries of CDCs in St. Louis corresponded with wards, and there was a time when alderpersons could influence what projects were funded. The interesting thing is

this union of three CDCs now stretches across several wards. It has afforded the new organization autonomy and the ability to listen to the community – it can't be undercut or taken down by various stakeholders. We know the politicization of community development is everywhere, but it's the voice of the community that should be heard first, and the job of elected officials to help that happen.

Ann Houston: We set up Opportunity Communities (OppCo), as an alternative method of building scale and preserving community control while mitigating the reluctance two or more CDCs might have to partnering.

Nancy Turner: Two organizations, The Neighborhood Developers (TND) and Nuestra formed a new, third 501(c)(3) nonprofit late last year which launched in April. Each CDC remains independent: OppCo merges staff in several key areas which it employs, then leases back to TND and Nuestra. For real estate development and resident services, most senior staff is now centralized and we have dedicated staff for each CDC dedicated to one office or another.

The initial vision was to ultimately sign on 10 CDCs, starting with two in 2019. We won't need to double the number of people working here since we're already enjoying economies of scale. We have one CFO since Nuestra was contracting that position out. We've blended the finance team – one person to handle receivables and payables and one payroll person. Before, TND had a staffing gap for a head of resident and tenant services when an employee left. Nuestra's tenant services head has filled that role.

Ann Houston: We've sought to centralize operations like financial management, HR, professional development, learning and evaluation, data management, resource development systems, grant management systems – back office administrative tasks CDCs can share while remaining focused on their neighborhood and core constituencies.

One big benefit is in learning and evaluation – work that supports CDC development. TND has spent the last eight years working on a Salesforce system for all of our client management. We track every real estate project – all construction types, financing, unit counts, and profiles of each real estate development. Through tenant services, the program has goals to identify work for property

management. We can flag tenants who are behind in payments, for instance, we have 175 households across the CDCs flagged right now. That makes it possible to figure out what kind of outreach and services to link tenants up to and help in real-time.

It's a plus for our grant work. We used it to track all of our annual workplans and deliverables. Funders are increasingly asking for this.

Q: CAN EFFICIENCY FROM SCALE EVER SUBSTITUTE FOR BUILDING STRONG BONDS WITH NEIGHBORHOODS?

Joe Kriesberg: No. Listen, all affordable housing developers can face opposition in local communities from those who have legitimate concerns about scale, traffic, parking and other impacts to those whose opposition is based on racism or classism. CDCs – at least those with deep roots and strong community engagement capacity – can mitigate that by organizing their members, allies and supporters. Credibility with local stakeholders can help them weather the storm and navigate political challenges. When organizations try to develop affordable housing without those local connections, they can find themselves in trouble quickly – something we have seen in Massachusetts on more than a few occasions.

Bernie Mazyck: We learned that we need a strong partner which is well-rooted in a target community in order to make scale work. A few years ago, we launched a Neighborhood Stabilization Program project in Greenwood, South Carolina as an opportunity to bring in a needed service, two-and-a-half hours from Charleston where we're based. We anticipated \$1 million to purchase, rehab and resell 15 to 20 homes. We couldn't find a partner directly in the community to provide operational support, so we worked with groups in neighboring towns. The distance made things complicated, especially since we were the sponsors. Our own staff had to kick in time driving back and forth to Greenwood. We estimated the project would last two years. It took four years from the purchase of the units to the time we sold them.

Q: SO JUST HOW NEW IS THE NOTION OF SCALING UP?

Joe Kriesberg: If you think about it, scale is behind the creation of CDC associations in the first place – it helped small CDCs combine their power in order to influence the larger system. We are examples of how CDCs can collaborate so they don't have to go it alone. We do it in offering insurance, providing training programs for CDC staff, helping to set policy, and in a myriad of other ways.

“There is no substitute for local engagement and building trust.”

Q: LOOKING FORWARD, WHAT SHOULD NACEDA MEMBERS TAKE AWAY AS NEW IDEAS?

Ann Houston: Change is always a struggle. For OppCo, there was concern on the part of board and staff members that each group would lose unique identities or one organization would overpower the other. It took real commitment. We made sure there was equal representation from both CDCs, especially on the senior leadership team. The other source of resistance, fear of change, is always daunting because this is a new model. We've stressed at every step that this is very much a both-and framework. We've sought to allow each of the CDCs to serve their base communities and that's helped to deepen our sense of mission.

Marty Kooistra: The goal is to create the greatest programmatic output achievable with the least organizational weight. Most efforts to scale, however, are plagued by adding infrastructure and assets months late instead of strategically in advance to pave the way. It's really about allowing people to embrace a different vision of outcomes. Too often, a scarcity mentality drives internal thinking. Community development associations have to figure out how to get out of this perspective.

Joe Kriesberg: In the end, community engagement – recruiting resident leaders, developing more leaders, organizing residents and business owners – is the only way our field achieves scale because ultimately this is a political question. The only way we secure the policies, programs, and dollars we need to truly scale up is to build political power – and that means building community leadership that can mobilize people at the grassroots level to influence the policy making process.

James A. Anderson is a tenured English professor at the Lehman College campus of the City University of New York and a journalist with over 25 years of experience covering economics as well as finance and community development. His work has appeared in Shelterforce, Barron's, The New York Times and Black Enterprise Magazine among other publications.

- ▶ How would you define “scale”? How would you define “community accountability”? How would we know if we achieved either?
- ▶ How do you think a focus on increasing scale might place us at odds with the desires of the communities we serve?
- ▶ Can efficiency from scale ever substitute for building strong bonds with neighborhoods?

RESPONSE #1**Coalition Building for Power**

By Peter Cohen

The question of scale in the community development sector has several dimensions. This essay explores them nicely. There are pragmatic operational issues about “scaling up.” There are partnerships, mergers, and creative collaborations. And, there are geography issues depending on the reach of organizations. But Joe Kriesberg’s comment is the punchline – “in the end, community engagement ... is the only way our field achieves scale because ultimately this is a political question. The only way we secure the policies, programs, and dollars we need to truly scale up is to build political power.”

We should be cautious about ambitions of scaling up that overly focus on CDCs growing bigger operations as affordable housing developers without deepening or broadening the commensurate scale of community engagement and community-building. Sure, bigger projects and more units can get built, but it does raise a question about the “community” part of the CDC model. Some CDCs continue to hold strong to that model and focus on a core “base” neighborhood or constituency while branching out to do scattered housing development projects when opportunities arise. But they always join with a local community based partner to connect the project to local organizing and community-building.

CDC associations, like ours in San Francisco, are also the means by which CDCs can scale, to facilitate partnerships when needed across a wider geography while maintaining the core local focus of each individual CDC. That serves as an effective coalition-building model, both within the association of CDCs, with basebuilding community organizations outside the CDC “sector,” and with other organized sectors that have critical touchpoints to housing such as labor, faith organizations, health services, transportation, and environmental organizations. From this coalition-building at various scales, political power can be strong and results can flow to the benefit of greater community impacts.

However, that coalition-building model is challenged by the model of scaling-up that primarily focuses on growing big individual organizations. Funding and political power can flow to that model as well, and in many respects, it is easier to grow one organization than to undertake the continuous enterprise of collective work through associations and coalitions. But, if in the end we believe that the political power which fuels our CDCs movement is a collective community-based power more than just

the raw concentrated power of a few major players, then we should look to coalition-building as the method to scale-up organizational impact.

Peter Cohen is co-director of the Council of Community Housing Organizations in San Francisco, California.

RESPONSE #2**Small Scale Can Have Big Impact**

By Don Bianchi

I would like to offer a perspective on how a subset of community development, affordable housing, can reflect the necessary balance of scale and accountability.

My organization, the Massachusetts Association of CDCs, researched the scale of affordable housing projects awarded funding in the State Department of Housing and Community Development’s annual rental round for tax credit and other projects. Since 2011, they awarded almost \$440 million in state bond funds for the development of just under 12,000 rental units. Only 2% of these units were in projects with fewer than 20 units. And, only 6% of the total soft debt subsidy (not including tax credit equity) went to these smaller projects.

Why does this matter? On one level, scale is absolute. A 200-unit project provides 10 times as many homes as a 20-unit project. But on another level, scale is relative and that is in the context of Impact.

In some circumstances, a small number of units can make a big impact, such as in rural areas. In smaller cities that have lost their manufacturing base and face persistent problems with disinvestment, a small project, or a series of small projects, can be a key to neighborhood revitalization. Similarly, a small project in an infill location can be key to eliminating blighted buildings or vacant lots.

Recently, our board members had the opportunity to tour several blocks in the City of Worcester, where Main South CDC has transformed a once-blighted neighborhood. Over a period of several years, the CDC acquired sites where they built or rehabilitated a series of small rental and ownership projects. In addition to the approximately 140 new affordable homes, Main South CDC partnered with Clark University and other local institutions to develop playing fields, make improvements to a local park, and use a U.S. Department of Justice grant to work with the City on crime reduction. In a park where young people playing basketball were once imperiled by frequent drive-by shootings, we saw families with strollers, people of all ages relaxing, and yes, young people playing basketball without fear.

Main South CDC Director Steve Teasdale pointed out that the evening before, over 200 people attended a concert in the park. This revitalization would not have been possible without state funding for small-scale, high-impact housing development, which anchored the neighborhood revitalization efforts. To that end, our association's advocacy for a dedicated pool of state funds for small-scale rental projects (fewer than 20 units) paid off. We succeeded in obtaining the State's acknowledgement that small-scale housing can have a large impact.

So my answer to the question "Can Our Field Achieve Scale and Local Accountability?" is yes when it comes to housing if:

1. We define scale in terms of impact, not number of units;
2. The housing is developed by a community-based organization as an outgrowth of its community engagement; and
3. Public funding programs support housing development initiatives of community-based organizations, including smaller organizations, regardless of the number of units in a project, so long as the "scale of impact" is significant.

Don Bianchi is senior policy advocate for the Massachusetts Association of Community Development Corporations.

RESPONSE #3

Scale and Accountability: a "Both And" Strategy

By Bob Zdenek

Community development, as a field, has demonstrated its ability to achieve both scale and accountability. One of the distinguishing features of community development is the ability to engage diverse stakeholders and achieve significant community development results in affordable housing, commercial revitalization, business development, community facilities, workforce development, and other vital community initiatives.

In our book, *Navigating Community Development: Harnessing Comparative Advantages to Create Strategic Partnerships*, Dee Walsh and I draw from 50 years of community development history to point to the need for CDCs and other community development organizations to master a series of core competencies and find partners who have competencies that you lack and are needed to succeed in community development. Finding partners with complementary skills is one of the best ways to scale community development through engaging diverse stakeholders and sectors.

Accountability strategies and capacities are just as important as technical development competencies. We identified community engagement and public policy; communications; organizational development and leadership; and collaborations and partnerships as core community development competencies. One of our case studies on Northwest CDC in Milwaukee, showed how a small CDC leveraged their deep community knowledge to partner with large industrial employers and connect people who need jobs to quality jobs. REACH CDC in Portland, Oregon, wanted to expand into a new region and state and did this by partnering with a small CDC who had strong roots in the community and knew the political landscape. East Bay Asian Local Development Corporation was able to launch an ambitious healthy neighborhoods initiative through engaging a dozen community partners. Older adult residents realized benefits such as funds to remove blight, increased walking time across busy intersections, and a Federal Qualified Health Center that provides hypertension screenings.

Community development has always strived to be comprehensive in responding to the political, social, and economic challenges and opportunities of diverse communities. We need different types of organizations to build political and economic power and to marshal resources. Networks and associations have been integral to the growth of community development in helping develop and build a movement and industry while representing the aspirations of individuals and organizations. Fahe is a good example of a network: 50-plus community organizations in Central Appalachia serving low-income and other vulnerable populations that now develop over 8,000 affordable homes a year. Fahe was able to leverage the specialized expertise of their members to achieve scale together.

Collaborations and partnerships are operational strategies for advancing both accountability and scale. There are 14 different types of partnerships from an MOU at one end to a merger at the other end which is often among equal organizations, while acquisitions tend to be strong organizations taking over weak organizations. Collaborations are becoming more important for integrative strategies that incorporate health, environment, arts, financial capability, and other initiatives into the community development tool box. These collaborations enrich communities and bring diverse stakeholders together to advance the shared vision of community development. Community development is both an art and science based on hope and possibilities.

Bob Zdenek is a principal investigator for the Public Health Institute and a community development consultant.



RACIAL EQUITY

How can community development relate to the broader goals of racial equity?

Photo: Women in Reentry Day was organized by a powerful team of formerly-incarcerated women who are advocacy fellows at the People's Paper Co-op. Photo by Mark Strandquist

ON SOCIAL AND RACIAL JUSTICE ... OR JUST ASK THE NICE BLACK LADY



By Pamela Bridgeforth

FLATTERY CAN GET ONLY YOU SO FAR

I could never refuse Joe McNeely anything. The founder of the Development Training Institute, the Central Baltimore Partnership, board member of NACEDA (the National Alliance of Community Economic Development Associations), and a true exemplar of a cool dude asked me to share some thoughts with folks around community development, social justice, and race. How could I say no? By the way, can you do it in 1200 words or less?

“What if these unusual suspects suddenly became the leaders of our field?”

Wow! At first I was flattered to be asked. Watch out Ta-Nehisi Coates!! On second thought ... hey, wait a minute! How come the black lady gets to talk about social justice and race?! Why is it when people feel the need to explore

issues of social justice and race, they ask a black person to do the talking?! Could it be that non-blacks feel that they have less right to speak on this? Is it too cool (too cute?) to be the white, middle-class person talking about injustice? When did we break down by race who gets to talk and who gets to advocate for equality and decency as it relates to our sector?

No worries. This is a topic I feel comfortable talking about. Besides, isn't it the American way to wax poetic on issues you only have a passing understanding of — or are about what you just read this morning on Twitter, or heaven forbid, the Huffington Post news feed?! No worries there either as I just got rid of my flip phone and I giggle too much at the phrase tweet. (I think it's way too much time spent in the company of people under the age of eight.)

SOMEBODY FAMOUS ONCE SAID, OR DID THEY?

Now back to the matter at hand: social justice and racial equity in community development. Martin Luther King once said ... no, wait. They've heard and read that one before. Supreme Court Justice Thurgood Marshall had this to say ... no too long. Besides, there are just enough reformed lawyers in community development not to make this joke funny. How about the poet, Maya Angelou? ... no, no, no too esoteric. Why is this so hard?

Oh wait, that's right. The reason it's so hard to talk about community development's relationship to social justice and racial equity is that the very idea of it — the history and the effects of it — speaks to the sector's creation as a radical and aggressive response to America's social and racial justice fight. We (the collective WE of resident volunteers, CDC staffers, funders, and government officials) have been too close to the fight to see what is really around us and how what we are doing is nation building (wait, nation healing?) at its very essence. We are continuing the fight at the block, city park, community meeting, and neighborhood levels.

Our work ... no stop fronting¹ ... the work of our member organizations is guerilla warfare and targeted drone deployment while also being neighborhood block party and kids' magic show. For us and for our members it's more of the same but it isn't. Most particularly now, we need to see our work for what it is as we seek to build new voices (new weapons and battlegrounds?) for the future. Have you ever noticed that the most vital and valued things in our lives are the places and people we ignore or forget about until they are under threat or are gone completely — like your old neighborhood and beloved granny, or the field of community development and maybe even Democracy?

**SAVE OURSELVES, SAVE OUR COUNTRY
(AND NO PRO-RATING IN-DIRECT COSTS!)**

At the Philadelphia Association of Community Development Corporations (PACDC) Equitable Development Conference in 2017, the keynote speaker, noted psychologist and author, Mindy Fullilove talked about the growing chasm of political and social ideology in our country. She said that if radical work wasn't quickly attended to, we could see our country fall into a civil war. Wait, what? Doc, no, that seems too extreme. But is it? Given increasing incidents of one-off violence and organized fringe-right-wing and fringe-lite causes, I am not so sure now. How can our work better respond to this growing chasm?

“If we don't change who is doing the work, the work of the collective WE will no longer continue to exist.”

We talk often about professionalizing our sector. But maybe we should return to our earlier roots and radicalize our work by opening more doors for unusual suspects to join in as paid staff and/or volunteers. There are entire neighborhoods in Philly, Newark, Boston, Los Angeles, Houston, and beyond where a significant

percentage of the young adult population is returning from incarceration desperate to make a change in their lives and the lives of folks in their communities. There is also a growing cadre of experienced and savvy senior citizens and whip-smart high school youth looking to step up to the plate and make their communities stronger and more resilient.

Yet with such diverse talent — namely non-white, and without a graduate degree in urban planning — would a CDC or a CDC association consider hiring them (for money)? Hire convicted felons? Old people and kids?!! Put down the kombucha juice and kale salad for just a moment and consider that as creative as we are as a sector in finding money to build things, we can and must be equally creative in working to find ways to build communities with people — all kinds of people.

In late spring of this year, PACDC hosted a half-day training on community organizing for neighborhood leaders. The sessions included a retired Mayor, a retired city councilman, and smart, passionate high school students eager to learn about what they could do to stave off the violence and isolation in their communities. Did I mention in those sessions we had a rich mix of races and socio-economic statuses as well?

Can you imagine what our neighborhoods and country could look like if these unusual suspects suddenly became the leaders of our field? Alright, alright, I know what you're thinking. Nice words, but where did you find those folks and how exactly would we pay for this so-called radicalization of the field? You're thinking it's too hard to work on cultural shifts in our sector's identity, funders won't support this work, blah, blah, blah. Ahh, poor babies. Get over it.

Now hear this: If we don't change who is doing the work, the work of the collective WE will no longer continue to exist. If our industry went away tomorrow, do you think our neighborhoods and the people that live and do business in them would all disappear too? Would the problems go away if we don't see them? Could we consider the possibility that our industry may and probably will shrink? Out of sheer necessity, we

¹ Fronting: (phonetic pronunciation frunting) Urban vernacular for misleading, not exactly telling the truth to make something seem greater than it is. Used in a sentence: "That guy is frontin' if he thinks anyone will believe he won't take his developers fee to close the gap on that LIHTC deal."

“Our work is the embodiment of democracy’s promise to us and from us.”

will have to rely on the unusual suspects to help carry the water for their communities in small ways (block clean ups) as well as large (neighborhood planning and visioning).

If you have some time and you are in Philly, come visit with my friends at the Village of Arts and Humanities, which runs the People’s Paper Co-op. Or meet the folks at Quaker City Coffee. Both of these entities — one a nonprofit and the other a social enterprise — are working with a diverse and rich cross section of folks re-entering society to do some good in their communities. The Village is also working with young people in a variety of ways to be the next wave of advocates and activists in their communities. If you stop by with some notice, we can share some food and chat with them. No kombucha or kale! But I bet you a bacon-egg-and-cheese that if you look, there are groups in your community doing similar work that you can learn from, too.

FLATTERY WILL GET YOU NOWHERE BUT HARD WORK WILL GET YOU EVERYWHERE

Now, let’s put on our big girl and boy pants and try to remember when our industry was just starting. (I hate that phrase industry — industries die but the fight for justice and just plain decency can never be killed or starved even when neglected.) Can we imagine when our sector’s early days started in the basements of houses of worship or in the living room of Ms. Myrtle? (You know you have a Ms. Myrtle in your community.)

- ▶ How would the work of our field change if we all agreed that our top priority was advancing racial equity?
- ▶ In what ways do you think a consciousness of racism is central to the work we are doing?
- ▶ How do we ensure the field’s professional practices reflect a commitment to advancing racial equity?

Think how hard it must have been. Can we imagine the radical audacity, the daunting and intimidating task of helping people live with dignity and decency in a new home that doesn’t leak when it rains or let in the cold? Can we fathom the herculean task of transforming communities where most people were leaving into places where everyone is fighting to stay?

While it isn’t much easier now to do this work, it is better with broad networks of knowledge and experience to help smooth the path — a bit (thanks NACEDA!) To repay the debt that we owe those folks who came before us in basements and living rooms, we need to look back at our past as we shape our next steps. We need to get more Ms. Myrtles, more young men and women coming out of prison, more teenagers, and more documented and undocumented immigrants trained, supported, and prepared to help us in our work — and to step in should and when the battlegrounds get still more intense.

That is our work. It is the full embodiment of democracy’s promise to us and from us to it. Now, let’s (let us all) get back to work and help continue to build our country by strengthening our neighborhoods. That’s all from the nice black lady.

Hey Joe, do I at least get a discount on the next NACEDA event for this?

Pamela Bridgeforth is director of programs for the Philadelphia Association of Community Development Corporations. She is indeed nice and very much hates kombucha and kale.

RESPONSE #1***Racial Equity is the Work of All***

By Kevin Sanada

Pamela Bridgeforth's essay speaks to the essence of community development. *"We (the collective WE of resident volunteers, CDC staffers, funders, and government officials) have been too close in the fight to see what is really around us and how what we are doing is nation building (wait, nation healing?) at its very essence."*

We're all here because we recognize injustice and decided to do something about it. While we may at times get caught up in our day-to-day, I still believe that our driving mission to uplift our communities will never be in doubt. It was true decades ago for the elders that founded our movement and, in these times of divisiveness, remains more important than ever. Because there is plenty of work still to do and, sadly, plenty of injustice still to confront.

To be clear, at the heart of injustice is usually race. What's really around us is the ongoing struggle to address centuries of systemic oppression and the need to chip away at a legacy of racism that continues to leave entire communities behind. Many of our elders experienced this first-hand through redlining, urban renewal, and racist immigration laws. They took action, forming some of the most influential community development organizations around today. Now we, as community economic development practitioners, inherit this work.

To do this, I believe we must acknowledge that we are now an industry – yes, one full of graduate degrees and unprecedented capability and expertise – and with that professionalization comes privilege. Privilege that needs to be constantly checked by opening new doors and empowering new leadership of color, welcoming young thinkers from communities fighting injustice today, and, in Pamela's words, "build(ing) new voices (new weapons and battlegrounds?) for the future."

I formerly worked for the National Coalition for Asian Pacific American Community Development (CAPACD), a national coalition of place-based organizations serving Asian Americans, Native Hawaiians, and Pacific Islanders. Among my most memorable moments were the times we brought community members of color – housing counselors, resident managers, and case workers – to Washington to speak directly to policymakers. Many had never been to a federal agency, had never even

seen a cabinet member up close. Some were nervous and unsure of what to say. Yet once the subject turned to their communities, you could feel the room flip. Suddenly the agency staffers were hearing things they'd never heard before and were nervously thinking of how to respond. It was always an awesome thing to see.

These moments remind me that our expertise and access as associations are not an end, but a means by which voices (weapons?) are elevated and heard. There are plenty of new leaders rising today, like the folks running reentry programs that Pamela mentions, and we have so much to gain by welcoming new voices and new perspectives of color to our (at times) old-school community economic development world.

Not to say any of this is easy. Our field has come a long way and we are now more capable than ever, but we should keep challenging ourselves. Perhaps what's needed doesn't offer the greatest return on investment, but requires us to take a chance on a raw, new staff person with big ideas. Maybe it's not the most compelling grant proposal or forces us to have some uncomfortable conversations. I feel it's a luxury to be able to worry about this kind of stuff, and with our legion of graduate degrees, I'm confident we'll figure it out. After all, none of this stuff ever deterred Ms. Myrtle. And, as Pamela eloquently puts it, "if we don't change who is doing the work, the work of the collective WE will no longer continue to exist."

And finally, let's not shy away from talking about race. Pamela raises this in the first paragraphs of her piece, and I believe it's an incredibly important point. As Frances Frei, a professor at Harvard Business School, has said, "diversity should not be the burden of the diverse." Because if communities of color could fix this stuff alone, it would've happened yesterday. It'll take all of us – from executive directors and program directors to assistants and interns, from frontline activists to supporters and allies – putting our heads together and learning from one another, to truly evolve our field and find relevance in a changing America.

Kevin Sanada is director of programs and policy for the California Community Economic Development Association.

RESPONSE #2

Speaking Up for a Just Society

By Cara Long Corra

Achieving racial equity is key to a just society. Long-standing racial inequities pose barriers to the overall health and well-being of citizens and communities alike and should be of particular and paramount concern to policymakers and community development practitioners. In order to ensure representation and inclusion in our work, the Neighborhood Preservation Coalition of New York State (NPCNYS) researches what is happening on the ground, and then tracks that back to policies and programs, or the lack thereof.

We look at the state policy and program landscape and ask questions related to inclusion and representation, questions such as: who has access to wealth-building opportunities like homeownership? Who is overrepresented and underrepresented in mortgage lending? Are living wage jobs available and broadly accessible? What are wages like between racial groups? The answers to these questions provide important clues about the health of our communities and our state.

I am disappointed to report that in New York State, the answers to these questions highlight racial inequities. Black, Latinx, and Asian residents are underrepresented as homeowners, with 66.5% of White residents owning homes compared with 29% of residents from communities of color. In fact, New York State has one of the lowest rates of homeownership by people of color among all 50 states and the District of Columbia. Only Rhode Island has a lower rate.¹

Compounding the issue is the percentage of high cost loans made to Black and Latinx borrowers, 7.75% and 6.86% respectively, compared with 3.05% for White borrowers. The median income for Black households represents only 62.5% of what White households earn; for Latinx residents, that figure is 61.4%.² The referenced figures provide stark evidence of racial inequities.

For the past several years, NPCNYS has been working with its members to better understand how these statistics relate to local need – and how that local need is met or not met by the present constellation of state funding programs available. What we have found is that while there are good and widely-used state programs, they are simply not enough.

NPCNYS has long argued that we need a constellation of state programs and funding, which can be layered: no one program can be all encompassing. We have also pushed for every state housing program to track demographic information, such as race, so that we can see if we are investing state money equitably. We have a clearly defined problem, which means that we must also have clearly defined solution.

But that's where this gets tricky(ier). I often find myself thinking – and sometimes saying – “You are trying to simplify a complex issue.” And then I turn around and think and say the converse, “You are complicating something which should be simple!” And indeed, the notion of equity is simple: ensure people have what they need to be successful. Equity is fundamentally tied to the pursuit of life, liberty, and happiness. As Americans, we should be able to grasp a concept that is essential to our democracy. But it is finding that agreement on how to achieve an even playing field that gets complicated.

In prior discussions with colleagues and decision-makers, I have become uneasy when asked to explain or further expound upon why there are such marked disparities in homeownership rates or in median incomes. The first time I was asked that question directly, I found myself searching the room with my eyes, hoping someone else would fill the silent pause. They did not. So I forced myself to say, “Because of...racism. Structural racism?” I did not state it, I asked it. Since that time, I believe I have gotten better at using my voice to clearly state facts, as my job demands. As the great writer and poet Audre Lorde once wrote, “Your silence will not protect you.”

Calling something by its name, therefore, has power. Addressing injustice is power. I am proud to represent a network of organizations that speak truth to power every day and has done so for many decades. This year, we are going to unite our voices to push hard for the creation of a dedicated statewide fund to help address our state's inequities in homeownership. As an organization, we have a core belief that housing is at the very center of people's lives. A home is where we feel safe, secure, and loved. A home is the key everyone needs to unlock an equitable and just future.

Cara Long Corra is executive director of the Neighborhood Preservation Coalition of New York State.

¹ Prosperity Now. Homeownership rate. Retrieved August 1, 2018, from <http://scorecard.prosperitynow.org/data-by-issue#housing/outcome/homeownership-rate>

² Policy Map. Retrieved August 1, 2018 from <https://www.policymap.com/>

RESPONSE #3***African American Churches and the Soul of Community Development***

By Bernie Mazyck

The history of community development goes back to Civil Rights Movement and African American churches. Our field began during a time when African Americans and other marginalized groups could not even go to a bank. Churches were the only institutions with the means to coalesce resources in the African American community. So, churches provided loans and equity investment to buy homes, start businesses, and get an education. The credit unions and CDFIs of today owe their beginnings to church-based loan funds.

In my ministry with the United Methodist Church, my core work involves helping the faith community to step up and recognize that they have a role to play in community development. We have about 850 United Methodist churches in South Carolina. If 25% of those churches became involved in community economic development work, they could have a huge impact on issues of poverty and inequity within the African American, Hispanic, and Native American communities.

Every state has a willing faith community that wants to engage in this work. It's a matter of finding the thought leader who aligns with this understanding of the social gospel; finding the church that's interested in being relevant to the community now and not just preparing for the hereafter. Once you find that faith community, they will be willing partners. The community economic development model helps equip faith communities to improve the lives of people in low-income communities.

Here in South Carolina, the Charleston Area Justice Ministries assembles 1,000 people to get behind a social justice issue each year. This year this multi-denominational group decided to get behind an agenda to address affordable housing, which is under assault by state and federal policy. We can have tremendous success in the improving economies of low-income places when the faith community recognizes their role in community economic development.

The political climate we're operating makes it even more important to nurture connections to the faith community. We're seeing forces push back on the work we've been doing for the last 40 years. We're seeing real-time oppression and escalating economic disparities. It is time for us to look in the mirror and make sure we stay focused on the core tenets of community development — equity and equal access.

As community economic development tries to align with market-oriented strategies, we run risk of leaving behind the very groups we started out trying to help and violating our own core tenets. Our mission is to put tools in place that marginalized and under-resourced people can use to engage in the economic system. We need to stay vigilant to prevent them from being worse off than they were just a few years ago.

Bernie Mazyck is president and CEO of the South Carolina Association for Community Economic Development and an ordained minister of the South Carolina Annual Conference of the United Methodist Church.



IDENTITY

Does community development connote a specific mode of practice? And is the term "community development" still useful to audiences external to our field?

Photo: This Is Germantown Heart & Soul," residents explored what they found meaningful about their neighborhood and envisioned the future of their business district. Photo by Lisa Jo Epstein of Just Act.

HAS THE TERM COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT RUN ITS COURSE?



By Brittany Hutson

IN CONVERSATION WITH THESE NACEDA MEMBERS AND BOARD MEMBERS:

Kevin Sanada *California Community Economic Development Association*

Arnold Cohen *Housing & Community Development Network of New Jersey*

Terry Chelikowsky *Florida Alliance of Community Development Corporations*

Peter Cohen *Council of Community Housing Organizations, San Francisco, CA*

Marla Newman *City of Winston-Salem, NC*

Born in response to the effects of urban renewal and inspired by the action of the Civil Rights Movement, the community development field has sought to empower individuals with the skills, tools, and resources they need to effect change within their communities. Specifically focused on revitalizing low-income, underserved neighborhoods, the field has expanded since the late 1960s. The field has become more comprehensive, now including a variety of stakeholders, initiatives, policies, and approaches.

The core mission hasn't changed. Community developers strive to empower communities by addressing issues like poverty, housing, education, employment, mobility, transportation, and health. The influences of globalization, the 2008 housing crash, shifting federal policies, and reductions in funding have people in the field reevaluating what community development means to internal and external audiences, and how it's affecting their ability to meet the demands of communities today.

Some professionals stand behind the phrase "community development," taking the perspective that if it ain't broke, don't fix it. They're used to the phrase and believe in the idealism behind it. Some professionals do acknowledge that the phrase just isn't conveying meaning in the way that it should.

WHAT'S IN A NAME?

The community development field evolved through partnerships with nonprofit and philanthropic organizations, and from receiving financial support from banks and the government. Despite the growth of the field, at times the phrase community development can get lost in translation. Although the work being done is community focused, there is not always a consensus to call it community development.

Professionals in the field say that community development work is multifaceted and that the term is fluid. The overall agreement is that community development is a holistic approach to empowering people. It is an approach that requires looking at the inter-connected nature of people and their brick-and-mortar environment. Community development professionals say that, amongst themselves, they understand and use the phrase "community development" to describe their work. However, they say that since the phrase isn't formally codified, people use the phrase in different ways and define it for themselves.

"I feel like there are so many organizations out there that have had this same kind of existential problem," says Kevin Sanada, director of programs and policy for the California Community Economic Development Association. "How do we define what community development is? Is it homelessness? Is it a health issue?"

Words evolve to adjust to current times and a new linguistic ecosystem. As such, what community development meant in the 1960s and 1970s doesn't seem to quite match up with how it is identified today. According to Peter Cohen, co-director of the Council of Community Housing Organizations in San Francisco, the phrase community development is still an insider term, and there is a disconnect in that the public and the media don't have a real sense of what the term means.

"Slowly but surely, the term will continue to drift off as kind of an old-school term," says Cohen, "it sounds kind of old and hippy from the 70s. Today we talk about the programmatic, siloed aspect of our community work as in we build affordable housing, we have workforce programs, we have reentry programs."

Cohen emphasizes that affordable housing development has gotten conflated to mean the same thing as community development, and this is affecting the perception of community development work. "Those in the field have to counterbalance that by continuing to talk more about what community development is," says Cohen. "We have to be more explicit and repetitive about reminding the public and the media, and even reminding our own affordable housing practitioners, that community development is a larger project than just building the affordable housing units themselves."

Access to affordable, livable homes has been a part of the fabric of community development since its emergence. But what pushed housing efforts to prominence over other community-based initiatives was funding and support.

"I think the focus on housing has sucked all the air out of the room," says Terry Chelikowsky, executive director of the Florida Alliance of Community Development Corporations. "It has really taken away from the broader concept of community and economic development." While community development organizations do focus on expanding affordable housing, some say they are trying to direct the conversation to the other human issues that are interconnected with place-based issues.

"There's obviously a need in the community for people to have safe, affordable, decent housing," says Chelikowsky. "But if you don't have an income stream, if you don't have any economy, if you don't have a local autonomy that is thriving, then you're not going to be able to support and sustain the population and the housing that they need to live in." She adds, "It's all integrated. I think by focusing almost exclusively on the housing part,

we let the other pieces fall by the wayside."

TAKING CONTROL OF THE NARRATIVE

Some organizations have been stepping back to have internal discussions about rebranding and how they can best communicate who they are and what they do to internal and external audiences.

Chelikowsky says that last year, the board of Florida alliance decided to focus on changing how they define themselves. They have had difficulty recruiting membership because, as Chelikowsky explains, most nonprofits do not consider themselves to be community development corporations. "Our definition is, if you are working in a low- to moderate-income community, and you are providing any kinds of programming or services that are designed to increase the chances for those individuals to have access to more opportunity and better access to prosperity, then you're doing community development," Chelikowsky says.

"The focus on housing has sucked all the air out of the room."

Shekeria Brown, executive director of the South Florida Community Development Coalition, says her organization revised and broadened their mission statement to attract potential members that identify themselves as community development practitioners and are working to improve communities. On their website, the coalition calls out their members as developers, nonprofits, financial institutions, municipal representatives, and others who "work to provide low and moderate-income people with access to the tools necessary to build wealth and to ensure that all neighborhoods are livable, safe, and economically vibrant."

Sanada says that his organization intentionally moved beyond focusing on housing, hence the phrase "community economic development" in their name. "Something we've come to realize over the years is that community development a lot of times means housing," he explains. "We really wanted to move away from that. "For us, it's looking at the broader kind of holistic needs as a community. There are a lot of opportunities, tools, and mechanisms that directly support affordable housing. There

are small business opportunities, workforce development, and a lot of other pieces that are completely essential to the community that don't have that type of support or industry behind them."

"One of our main drivers is really elevating that piece of it," explains Sanada, who adds that his organization focuses on issues and services like employment, incubator spaces, and fresh food programs. Sanada, who has a policy background, says that the disconnect relating to community development extends to the federal level, causing some programs to miss the mark at the ground level.

"If you look through a lot of HUD's programs, I think they would all agree that they do community development activities, but most of them are housing programs," he says. "You tend to see these kinds of wonky solutions being thought up at the federal level that should, in theory, be working everywhere. But I think the big problem with that is that the solutions needed are local ones. Who's your community when you're doing a national program that is supposed to fix all the problems across the entire nation? I think that most policy happening at the higher levels is well intended, but the actual results are probably not what a lot of folks on the ground want to see."

The key is having advocates and a presence in Washington, DC, to represent the needs of communities beyond housing, Sanada says. He stresses the critical role that advocates play in pushing agencies "to make sure that things are really working, and if they aren't working, help them to figure out what needs to happen. It's an important role and an important part of this broader industry that arguably needs to be strengthened, to be honest."

LANGUAGE OF THE FUTURE

People in the field aren't completely ready to ditch the phrase "community development" as a catchphrase. However, they recognize that the phrase does not make it easy to tell the story of the field, the work, and its goals. A steady stream of new terms and phrases are emerging

in the discourse, including revitalization, prosperity, prosperous, thriving communities, equitable development, and inclusive growth.

Brown says that the aforementioned words come up any time that she has been a part of naming a new conference workshop. So where are these terms and phrases coming from? Brown says she thinks it may come from other related sectors doing community-based work, and people are trying to find a term that's positive and aspirational.

"The questions that come up are 'what could we call this? What are we trying to accomplish?'" she explains. "Then you get, 'we want prosperity for everyone. We want everyone to thrive.' So, I think a lot of it comes from the vision that we want to see." Proposing new words and phrases is one thing, but the question is how will these new phrases take shape within the field? Are these words truly encompassing the message that community development practitioners want to convey?

Marla Newman, community development director for the City of Winston-Salem, North Carolina is not entirely sure. "Part of the struggle right now is trying to think about what a word means," she says, "and part of what I'm processing is, if I say revitalization, am I leaving out something that's a part of this or not?" Chelikowsky is also uncertain about changing the term. She does acknowledge that the first step in controlling the branding starts with people in the field.

"If we as a group could come to a consensus about how to talk about what we do, then maybe we could drive the conversation with those other stakeholders – with local, state, and federal government agencies that provide funding. Maybe that's what we need to do."

Brittany Hutson is a freelance journalist based in Detroit. She has written for Black Enterprise Magazine, Essence Magazine, The Wall Street Journal, Shelterforce Magazine, and Diverse: Issues in Higher Education.

- ▶ **What phrase or name do you use to describe the work we do? Do you find that most people understand that phrase or name right away?**
- ▶ **How is the definition of community economic development changing and evolving, given current circumstances and resources?**
- ▶ **In what ways does the term community economic development (and other jargon in our field) make us more efficient with our work? In what ways does it hold us back?**

RESPONSE #1***So What Is Community Economic Development Anyway?***

By Brian McGrain

I've spent nearly 20 years in the field of community economic development, and I still have trouble describing what exactly it is. Is it synonymous with community development? Why is it so focused on affordable housing? How is it measured? Who's in control? What does it look like when it's done well? The first line in the *Wikipedia* definition includes the phrase "a field of study."¹ That strikes me as an odd thing to say right out of the gates, given that I've always felt our field was an action-oriented one.

Even on our own websites, we seem to come up short describing what it is we do. While we may talk around the fringes, or describe the work of our members, it's difficult to find what we ourselves define as the core work we engage in. It also doesn't help us that others tangentially related to our work have co-opted our terms. Can a bank really have a community development lending arm?

With all that being said, it's probably more important now than ever that we rescue our own phrase and define it on our own terms. What should be included? Obviously, our work is centered in improving lives by enhancing the prosperity of those we work with. This enhanced prosperity can come in many ways, and should be reflective of the needs of the community.

There also needs to be a strong element of self-control – those being affected must be calling the shots. Community economic development should be less about intervention from the outside and more about determining one's own destiny. There could be a really important role for CED associations to assist members in recruiting and training neighborhood-based talent to be effective Board members.

I've always found it problematic that in years past, what we did as a field was driven by the funding available. In an attempt to keep our doors open, we went after whatever we could to turn a profit to keep us in business. While this caused mission drift – which is bad enough – it also took away our control as we became more beholden to external funders than to our own community members. Looking to the future, we need to return to the days of identifying our own needs and working to address those needs on our own terms.

Again, an important role for a CED association to take could be in helping members articulate their goals and then pressing funders to support activities truly needed within a community. And perhaps CED associations

across the nation can finally take on that most sacred of cows, the Community Reinvestment Act? Who isn't tired of hearing the phrase "that's not CRA eligible?" Perhaps CRA eligibility ought to be redefined to support community organizing and other similar activities.

The challenge for the future, for those engaged in community economic development at the state and national level, will be to not only succinctly define our work, but to bolster it and defend it. By making a clear case for what it is and why it can be so life-changing, we will help those in communities we engage with by making the case for why their efforts are worthy of support.

Brian McGrain is director of economic development and planning for the City of Lansing, Michigan.

RESPONSE #2***A Rural Take on Terminology***

By Dave Christopolis

My perspective is informed by my life and work in a rural region. Our rural communities have seen sharp decreases in population, limited proactive public policy, and years of disinvestment. The lopsided focus on urbanization continues to negatively impact rural communities that were once essential to our country's economic prosperity. This has contributed to the political divisions in our society and the symptoms of fractured vision, political inaction, and spiritual bankruptcy.

What we in the community development field call our work is less important than what we do. I don't mean to minimize the importance of language and symbolism, but our work occupies a small space in the public's consciousness and will always be unclear to a segment of the population.

How we do our work is more important than who we say we are. Our best strategy to increase our sphere of influence in our society is to invest more time, money, and energy into community organizing, leadership development, and civic reciprocity.

We need to be strong reciprocators who set examples for community members on how to engage neighbors around issues facing the community. We need to create spaces for people to take action, understand the levers of power, and implement strategies that demand local control as a means to promote community development. Better government services and more money are not the best solutions, although they are important tools we need to continue to advocate for.

¹ Community economic development. Retrieved August 1, 2018, from https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Community_economic_development

The trend to focus on marketing, branding, and social media at CDCs can be a fool’s errand, buying into the system and bowing down to the capitalist model of free market principles. Economic justice requires push-back on systemic failures that have contributed to the largest gap in income and wealth in our lifetime and beyond. We must ask ourselves what our current relationship is to the marketplace and what we are willing to tolerate when we participate in the practices that negatively impact low- to moderate-income Americans (e.g. accepting money from certain institutions or businesses that may not truly support our mission or advertising their logo on our websites).

We need to have a conscience. Actions speak louder than words. If we are effective in our work and grow our local support, we will worry less about what terminology we use. When in doubt, we should use plainspoken language that people in our communities can relate to.

Let’s focus on our mission and our best strategies to engage and empower our local community members who have all the talent, smarts, and motivation to do our work for us. The community development movement needs to take a wide view of its mission to promote desperately-needed economic and racial justice to our rural communities. The power is in the people. We can help amplify their voices!

Dave Christopolis is the executive director of Hilltown CDC in Chesterfield, Massachusetts.

RESPONSE #3

Slicing Up the Communications Pie

By Jessica Love

The words “community development” don’t say enough about what we do. Those who originally established our association will tell you that the goal was to bring a variety of organizations together under a big tent to meet a common goal, in essence, community vitality. The term “community economic development” was meant to convey a “comprehensive” message. When community economic development didn’t do that anymore, the language became “comprehensive community development.”

Comprehensive community development took us to a place where we no longer seemed so focused on housing. Instead, we’re focused on all aspects of a healthy community. Later, the word “prosperity” came into play. Our most recent translation has been to say, “comprehensive community development = adaptive prosperity.” At the Indiana Association for Community

Economic Development — now rebranded as Prosperity Indiana — we even made that leap in our naming.

But in the brief time that I’ve been the executive director, I’ve had multiple conversations where leaders of organizations that we consider critical partners no longer see how they fit into our membership. Although the purpose of our messaging had been to help them think about their relationship to others in the field and do their work better, in speaking so comprehensively we lost some of our target audience.

Members we have been working to serve stopped seeing a place for themselves under our big tent. The big tent that we’ve always had, mind you. In focusing our message so broadly around the fact that community development is about everything that contributes to a healthy place, our message had become exclusionary, instead of inclusionary.

Where I’ve landed is this: We are not focused (singularly) on just one aspect of community development — whether it’s being the statewide housing organization or statewide homeless-serving organization or statewide anything that sounds super narrow. We are, in fact, about all things community development. We always have been. I don’t imagine that’s changing any time soon. But we are (once again) changing our message.

Our new messaging will focus on highlighting the individual aspects of our work, not on its comprehensiveness. We’ll keep thinking about the comprehensive nature of it all. We’ll talk about comprehensive community development as a theory and process when appropriate. But mostly, we’ll be doling out how we talk about community development in bite-size slices. Conveniently, our new name is Prosperity Indiana, aka PI. So, we’ll be highlighting how aspects of our work are Piece of the PI(E) — with the focus being on the Piece not the PI.

I share this to encourage you to not get caught up in the name — whether community development or community economic development or comprehensive community development or prosperity. Get caught up in the work.

And when you talk about the work, I suggest doing something my parents always taught me: KISS. They would have said “Keep It Simple, Stupid.” But this sounds nicer: Keep It Simple, [community development] Superstar. (Or whatever you want to call yourself — since the whole point of this essay is that the name isn’t important.) What’s important is the work! So, focus on that — and go get ‘em, Superstar!

Jessica Love is executive director of Prosperity Indiana.

RESPONSE #4**Enlarging the Circle**

By Val Iverson

Has the term “community development” run its course? Not by a long shot.

As stated in the essay, the core mission of community development, “to empower communities by addressing issues like poverty, housing, education, employment, mobility, transportation, and health,” is still vital, maybe now more than ever. And to continue our work, we should be enlarging the circle to encourage everyone to call themselves community developers.

Dr. Leland Kaiser, health care futurist, coined the term “community potentiation” wherein we are all working towards realizing the highest potential of the community and its residents. This model is based on abundance and community collaboration with a focus on the potential of people and maximizing their well-being.

Imagine if public health workers called themselves community developers. How about educators, law enforcement officers, and primary care doctors? What if we all worked together in a community? I’m not talking about a partnership here and there. I’m talking about systematic and deliberate integration of funding, planning, implementation, and evaluation of policies and programs with the people they affect.

A necessary step for this integration to occur is to agree on shared measures of success based on the health and well-being of the residents. No more counting the number of apartments built, or school test scores, or the number of people employed through a job training program. We should all base success on these same shared measures of community potentiation.

Community development is more relevant than ever. We are all in this together. In the long run, the path to success is the redesign of our systems to fund upstream solutions like affordable homes, access to healthy foods, a good education, and jobs.

Valerie Iverson is principal at Iverson Ideas Consulting and a member of NACEDA’s Board of Directors.

RESPONSE #5**Building Bridges with Words**

By Jenny Connelly-Bowen

Language matters a lot to me. It has for as long as I can remember. My mom is a voracious book-lover and taught me to read at age four. I majored in English as an undergraduate and studied Spanish on the side. I’ve been long-steeped in the idea that what we say is only half of what matters; what’s equally important, although it isn’t always treated with equal weight, is *how* we say it.

I think every profession, to some extent, struggles with “the jargon problem.” In the grocery industry, where I worked for five years after graduating from college, my colleagues puzzled over the same issues that community development professionals are grappling with now. “So many acronyms!” we would declare, throwing our hands up. “How is anyone supposed to know what we’re saying?” (Maybe you’ve heard that one before.) In truth, though, I think that this obscure communal lexicon was, at times, a source of comfort for many.

But such is the contradiction of a shared language: it can exclude as much as it can include. Elif Shafak describes this as the treacherous “power of circles” in her 2010 TED Talk, “The Politics of Fiction”:

We all live in some kind of a social and cultural circle. ... But if we have no connection whatsoever with the worlds beyond the one we take for granted, then we too run the risk of drying up inside. Our imagination might shrink; our hearts might dwindle, and our humanness might wither if we stay for too long inside our cultural cocoons.¹

I don’t pretend to have a catch-all solution to our field’s struggles with language. But I will argue that we should all be thinking about our choice of words as often and as seriously as we’re thinking about the ideas we’re working to express.

We should be asking ourselves:

Can this vocabulary build bridges with people and places outside of our community development circles? Or are our words reinforcing the snug, familiar light and walls that we know best?

When we turn to the window, are we face-to-face with our own reflections? Or are we welcoming the wide world outside and its newcomers, fresh ideas, diverse perspectives, and opportunities for growth?

Jenny Connelly-Bowen is executive director of Community Builders Network of Metro St. Louis.

¹ Elif Shafak, “The Politics of Fiction,” TED Talk, 19:39, July 2010, https://www.ted.com/talks/elif_shafak_the_politics_of_fiction.



EMERGING LEADERS

How will a new generation of leadership change our field?

Photo: Emerging leaders in community development came together at the 25th anniversary celebration of the Metropolitan Consortium of Community Developers in Minneapolis. Photo by Ben Hejkal

HOW WILL A NEW GENERATION OF LEADERSHIP CHANGE OUR FIELD?



By Rose Teng

early in their careers can have, with optimistic visions of all that we could accomplish. I loved working with this group because they recognized me as a peer and provided honest feedback and a space to raise my voice. As someone relatively new to the field and a younger woman of color, I couldn't always count on being heard when I wanted to share an idea. A space just for us emerging leaders provided the perfect environment for me and others to voice our ideas. This ready-made cohort of peers learned and grew together, becoming confidantes, sounding boards, editors, and co-conspirators for years to come.

In 2014, the Metropolitan Consortium of Community Developers (MCCD) celebrated its 25th anniversary. The anniversary's theme was "past meets future," a year-long process celebrating the beginning of our organization and envisioning where we are headed. The whole staff was involved throughout the year, excited to share our work among a large group of members, peers, and partners. Having everyone focused on MCCD's past and future throughout the year generated many meaningful conversations, including some that were difficult.

At the time, I was in my late twenties and had been working at MCCD for a little over four years. Having recently completed a graduate degree in urban and regional planning and done a short stint in direct service with the Housing Choice Voucher program, I was eager to impact public policy around community development to create places of opportunity for low-wealth individuals.

At MCCD, I supported our member-driven public policy agenda and coordinated peer-to-peer learning. One of my favorite roles was leading and developing our Emerging Leaders in Community Development program, a group of early- and mid-career community development professionals who were eager to strengthen their networks, build their skillsets, and make an impact on the field.

I quickly saw in them an energy and enthusiasm for community development that perhaps only people

Thinking about the future of our organization and our field, we put our emerging leaders cohort forward to play a significant role in our 25th Anniversary Event. We had been doing what I believed was great work and now we could show our membership.

THE FOUNDERS

MCCD was founded in 1989 as a consortium of community developers, not only to be a more unified and powerful voice but to start the local community development movement as we now know it. Our organization's first board and staff members came to the field as organizers, agitating for change and improvement in the quality of life in their communities. They picked up skills along the way, how to write a pro forma, or put together a tax credit deal. All of MCCD's member organizations at the time were place-based, traditional community development corporations. They fixed up problem properties, built new affordable housing, and cleaned up storefronts. This was more-or-less a recipe for successful neighborhood revitalization.

When gathered, they would reminisce about the early days of the organization, share black- and-white photos of the groundbreakings of the first homes built in South Minneapolis, back when it was known as "Murderapolis". They would laugh at failed deals they wouldn't make again now, so many lessons, years, and projects later.

While a few of those founders have retired, some are still on our board today. Some are elected officials. Many are executive directors. They can claim thousands of affordable homes built, small businesses started, entrepreneurs coached, neighborhoods strengthened, and commercial corridors grown. They have an incredible record of success for future generations to build upon.

THE EMERGING LEADERS

The emerging leaders enter the Twin Cities community development field as passionate and entrepreneurial students of that history, working with the legends we studied in graduate school while simultaneously blazing our own paths. Many of us enter the field through a lens of local case studies. We emerging leaders take graduate-level classes called Private Sector Development and Financing Affordable Multi-Family Rental Housing. In our first community development jobs, we learned our organizations' business models and how they approached land acquisition and financing.

At the same time, our emerging leaders are not here just to learn how to get things done. They want to be part of the conversation as peers who have something valuable to teach as well as to learn. They want a mentorship that is reciprocal, where their mentor finds the mentorship program to be valuable to their work too. I agree.

“We are willing to challenge our lawmakers to think boldly.”

The emerging leaders in our field are more diverse than previous generations. Many come to the field with knowledge from their previous work in social services, public health, and policy. They offer a new perspective on how to achieve neighborhood revitalization and how to define goals for success. They are open to experimenting with new models, pursuing cross-sector alliances with new partners, and delivering a new message about community development's role.

Just within MCCD's membership, emerging leaders have spearheaded new asset management systems that have proven to be more effective and efficient, developed curriculum for resident leadership training programs, and helped to shape important housing policies at the local and state levels.

THE TENSIONS

There is a lot to agree on between the emerging leaders and the founders. We all value collaboration, we all believe that the communities we work with are exceptional places full of valuable assets, and we all want our field to continue to strive forward with creative and innovative solutions to today's largest community development issues. And that means we constantly want to do more and to do it better. A healthy tension results between celebrating past successes and thinking critically about how to improve upon those successes.

At MCCD, we have an ongoing series entitled, "Community Development Conversations." These are gatherings to bring together staff at our member organizations and also our partners in local and state government, philanthropy, and the private sector to discuss pressing issues in our field and our region.

Those local conversations mirror the same tensions I see sitting on NACEDA's board and attending national events — tensions that emerging leaders are already stepping up to address by learning from generations past while bringing their own creativity and energy. Perhaps unsurprisingly, we talk about pushing our field to be more diverse and inclusive. At MCCD, only one of our original board members is a person of color. Ethnic diversity has long been a challenge in our field more broadly.

The next generation of community development leaders has to push diversity and inclusion further — not just as a box to check but as an integral strategy for community improvement. I see emerging leaders doing this already, coming almost a full circle to return to the field's community organizing roots. This is still where community development as a field should continue to draw inspiration and workshop opportunities for future projects. We need to ensure that our leadership not only represents the communities where we work but includes those very same communities. Our community leaders should be our board members, our staff members, our executive directors.

We grapple with how to be developers but also be changemakers — processing transactions versus achieving transformation. Community developers have gotten very good at doing certain things. We build high-quality, affordable housing that cannot be differentiated from market-rate housing. We support thriving small businesses and invest in commercial corridors that our community members want to visit.

“We grapple with how to be developers but also be changemakers.”

Despite these successes, we aren't doing nearly enough. Communities across the country are dealing with serious affordable housing crises.¹ Community members are being displaced from neighborhoods where their families have lived or worked for generations.² We are losing our “naturally occurring affordable housing” faster than we can build new housing.³ It can feel like we aren't making progress. It can feel like there are more emergencies than opportunities.

The context and the environment where we work, namely the policy arena, is changing, too. This is especially true for local and state politics, where NACEDA members are most actively involved. There are younger candidates running for office, more women candidates, more candidates of color, and more LGBTQ candidates potentially double or triple the numbers in the past,⁴ offering an opportunity for potential allies. The new wave of elected leaders is responding to the same challenges that we see in our field and often have similar talking points. Our emerging leaders are the ideal people to be writing and delivering those talking points. And that can and should begin on the first day of a campaign rather than the first day in office.

Our issues are increasingly top-level priorities for voters and we should own that knowledge by participating in candidate education and creating space for more conversations during election season to discuss policies that create affordable homes and prosperous communities. No matter how bipartisan our issues are, policy and politics are both important to our field and we shouldn't be scared to participate in these arenas. This might mean hosting candidate forums or it might mean forming a

501(c)(4) to be more directly involved in elections.

Determining our organizations' roles can mean navigating a somewhat complicated landscape as nonprofits. We must acknowledge that when we aren't participating in these conversations, other groups are — and they are controlling the narrative around issues that are important to us. If we do not tell our story, others will define us.

THE MESSAGE

How we talk about our field matters. Our minds and opinions are increasingly inflexible. You can see this when you read the comments to any online news article, no matter the topic. In a recent report on affordable housing messaging, The FrameWorks Institute and Enterprise Community Partners discuss the “backfire effect” — providing people with evidence that contradicts inaccurate beliefs can actually make them double down on their original positions.⁵

We spend a significant amount of time collecting data, breaking down data, and discussing data as we attempt to win people over with the right combination of data and storytelling. Research has shown that this may not be as effective as we think. Our message may not win over the skeptics, who can often hold tightly to misconceptions about our field while preventing potentially successful developments from getting built or adding unnecessary costs and delaying timelines.

Let's try to meet people where they are and develop different communications strategies for those who are always with us, sometimes with us, and almost never with us. How can we get people to think about their own homes and their own communities when we talk about housing and community development? Addressing this challenge will mean thinking differently about our strategic communications.

¹ Jones, D. (2018, April 5). *Concern for Seattle's Housing Crisis is Rising*. Retrieved from <https://www.seattlemag.com/news-and-features/concern-seattles-housing-crisis-rising>

² *Gentrification and Displacement*. Retrieved August 1, 2018, from <https://www.frbsf.org/community-development/initiatives/gentrification-and-displacement/>

³ Abello, O. P. (2018, May 7). *Beating Luxury Developers at Their Own Game*. Shelterforce (Spring 2018). Retrieved from <https://shelterforce.org/2018/05/07/nonprofit-developers-are-back-in-the-game/>

⁴ Holder, S. (2017, November 06). *The New Wave of Local Candidates Running for Office*. Retrieved from <https://www.citylab.com/life/2017/11/new-wave-of-local-candidates/544853/>

⁵ Manuel, T., Ph.D. & Kendall-Taylor, N., Ph.D. (2016, October). *You Don't Have to Live Here*. Retrieved from: <https://www.enterprisecommunity.org/resources/you-dont-have-to-live-here>

Seeing my peers communicate on Twitter, I recognize that we have the potential to drive new language, evidence, and arguments on behalf of our communities. We can combine new messaging strategies with a political strategies that sow the seeds for a new generation of political leaders. By talking to today's candidates about the need for stable, affordable homes and communities, we can influence tomorrow's city councilors, state delegates, and U.S. Senators. It's an area our emerging leaders are embracing as essential to our organizations, not something "nice" that should be funded only when resources are plentiful.

"If we do not tell our story, others will define us."

The emerging leaders I know, both through our group here in Minnesota and through the larger NACEDA network of emerging leaders, are brave, courageous, and creative. We aren't afraid of what we can't do: that we can't end homelessness or eliminate poverty or end racism. We know that our field is uniquely positioned to help address these issues. We are here to offer innovative ways to do that, even if it goes against some of the tried

and true methods our field has relied on in the past. We are willing to challenge our lawmakers to think boldly and our philanthropic funders to invest more deeply and be our partners in these endeavors.

It has been four years since MCCD's 25th anniversary and we are beginning to think about our next major milestone, but I am still so excited about the work that our emerging leaders are doing to shape and change the field of community development. I have already seen some of our leaders "emerge" from planning the events to being showcased as featured speakers and from running background analyses to leading major community development initiatives. I can only hope that we can enjoy these accomplishments and continue to learn from each other and from the next group of "emerging leaders" when it's our time to be called "founders."

Rose Teng is the public policy director for the Metropolitan Consortium of Community Developers (MCCD), the association of nonprofit community development organizations in the Minneapolis-St. Paul metropolitan area. Along with the MCCD members, Rose helps to craft the policy platform and legislative agenda and works directly with local and state officials on implementing these policies on behalf of the membership. Rose serves on the NACEDA Board of Directors.

- ▶ **What approach to or our work seems to characterize the young people coming into the field? How is it similar or different from previous generations?**
- ▶ **What leadership strengths do the next generation of our field's leaders possess? Lack?**
- ▶ **What unique aspects of community economic development attract talented young people? What keeps them in the field?**

RESPONSE #1***Keep Conversation Alive
Between the Generations***

by Marla Y. Newman

How a new generation of community development leaders will change the field is often one of those frightful questions founders and seasoned practitioners alike pose as the landscape around us shifts.

Will their education and “book learning” over-shadow the “why” and, by extension, value of some of the field’s traditions? Is there a real understanding of who our trailblazers are? For instance, how many know who Diane Sterner is and why NACEDA bestows an award in her honor?

What has been interesting to watch is the professionalization of the community development field. Opportunities from university degree programs to professional certificates have become major contributors to growing our field of emerging leaders. And for all that’s learned about the various technical facets of the work, I’m also convinced that building stronger, more intentional bonds with our elder practitioners can support the change offered by the new generation.

There is local context—relationships, politics, culture, history, custom and tradition—that can be gained by drawing on the wisdom of those earlier leaders, much like what MCCD does. I got my start in this work in Kansas City, MO. There, I was fortunate to have leaders like Don Maxwell and Ken Bacchus to help me with both the hard and soft skills needed to be effective. For that I am eternally grateful, and still remain in contact.

It is significant that NACEDA recognizes the need to support and even cultivate our next generation of leaders. There’s much work to be done; so many old battles we thought we’d won (segregation, fair housing, access to health care) have reappeared, layered on top of the ever-growing challenges of persistent poverty, racial and gender-identity intolerance, and economic inequity, to name a few. Our seasoned practitioners, who’ve been down these roads before, can be tremendous resources and able compatriots in the fight for the future of our communities.

As our next generation of community development leaders assumes more positions of power and influence, and infuse their knowledge, passion and creativity into this work, I challenge them to make it a practice to build meaningful bonds with the elders of the field and stay grounded in the “why” of this work.

Marla Y. Newman is community development director for the City of Winston-Salem, North Carolina, and a member of NACEDA’s Board of Directors.

RESPONSE #2***Leadership is a Collective Habit
We Must Nurture***

by Jeremy Brownlee

Just as our field is committed to comprehensive community development, so too must we be committed to comprehensive leadership development. As Rose mentions, that means encouraging and valuing leadership from a wide array of folks who work to ensure all communities are safe and equitable places.

Community development necessitates collective leadership. The transformative roots and values of the field demand that of us. This is not a new path, but the slow work of consensus-building and growing relationships is indeed the road less traveled. It takes time and courage – bolstered by the long memory and wisdom of those who have blazed the path before us – to choose to make decisions and share power in less hierarchical ways.

When I served in AmeriCorps through Public Allies, we embraced the idea that “leadership is an action many can take, not a position only a few can hold.”¹ Following that maxim, we ask ourselves what we can do to encourage leadership development that supports everyone to lead when and how they can. I would wager that many community organizations already work in a way that is co-creative, responsive, and ultimately an outgrowth of relationships and sharing.

And Rose challenges those of us who operate at the network level to imagine what cultivating leadership means for systemic change. Who is welcomed in crafting policy and making cross-sector decisions? What is the pipeline for leadership positions? How are we infusing justice, equity, and community control into our stances and practices? How does the field honor the leadership and wisdom of long-standing community champions?

Our field must model collective and collaborative leadership at all levels, from the neighborhood block to the voting bloc. The way forward involves grassroots and inclusive civic leadership that is often difficult, messy, contentious, and contradictory. But it is wholly necessary.

Jeremy Brownlee is membership director at NACEDA.

¹ Schmitz, P. (2012). *Everyone Leads: Building Leadership from the Community Up*. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.

DISCUSSION GUIDE

The objective of the *Talking Values: Soulful Conversations within Community Economic Development* is to create a dialogue among those who care about the field of community economic development and to take us beyond the usual conversations about programs, techniques, and resources.

Community values that gave rise to the field — equality and opportunity — sometimes get lost in the day-to-day business details. Yet at this moment, it is those values and vision that need to be rejuvenated, brought more clearly to the surface, and articulated among a new generation of leaders. The field may need to be re-oriented or even redefined.

Talking Values is intended as a catalyst of conversations, not as an answer or the end of discussion. We expect NACEDA members, and those they touch, to use *Talking Values* as a tool to create conversations in a variety of settings, among staff and board of community economic development organizations, community leaders, and supporters in a variety of institutions. We look to get at the questions or issues rumbling beneath your group's usual activity, the issues that often get overlooked or ignored.

This Discussion Guide is intended to help you facilitate that process in four simple steps:

1. Preparation
2. Opening
3. Discussion
4. Closing

Preparation

We envision discussions might take place in a variety of forums. Two settings that might be led by a practitioner, who is not a professional facilitator, come to mind:

- a discussion as part of a meeting of the staff of an organization;
- a discussion as part of a regular meeting of the board of directors of an organization.

An open discussion at a conference with a mixed audience, like an annual statewide meeting, probably requires the skills of a professional facilitator.

The discussion organizer, you, would need to prepare differently for each of the settings. The discussion at a board meeting, for example, might be shorter than a staff meeting. Here are some basic preparatory steps:

1. Pick one of the essays for each discussion. Do not try to cover the whole range of essays in one discussion.
2. Make sure everybody has received the essay ahead of time and has ample time to read and reflect.
3. Decide who will lead or facilitate the conversation, maybe it's you. That person's role is to draw out participation from the group, not to make a presentation or be a commentator on the contribution of individuals in the group. Pick someone with the personality for that role.
4. As much as possible, prepare the physical setting of the discussion to encourage dialogue and cross conversation. Enable participants to see each other face-to-face, for example, rather than sit in theater or classroom style.

The most important thing in getting a discussion going effectively is for the facilitator to be absolutely crystal clear with the instructions you provide to the group. If the facilitator has time to practice, it would be to test all instructions on a second person. Have the second person repeat back to the facilitator what they think they should do. You don't want to waste time with people saying, "I don't know if this is what you want from me but ..." or "tell me again what I'm supposed to do" or "did you mean ...?"

Opening

Introduce the activity and what expectations, if any, you have as facilitator. Clarify by saying something to the effect of: “this discussion is not intended to come to closure on the questions. Rather it is intended to provoke reactions, surface issues, and allow us to discuss our values and vision for our work.”

Create an immediate opportunity for people to speak to set a participatory expectation from the beginning.

FOR EXAMPLE: A round robin opener among people who know each other might be “I am going to ask each of you to provide one sentence that reflects your reaction to the selected essay.” Model what you want by saying one of your own sentences.

FOR EXAMPLE: Among people who don’t know each other, you might ask participants to “introduce yourself by name, the name of your organization, and your role in the organization, adding, in one sentence, the first thing that came to mind when reading the essay.” Model what you want them to do by saying your name, your organization’s name, and your title. Then say one sentence that adds what came to your mind.

If the group has more than eight people, ask people to pair up with their neighbor to share their first reaction to the essay or question. Then ask the pairs each to share one sentence with the full group.

REVIEW SOME GROUND RULES:

1. There is no right or wrong answer, correct or incorrect comment.
2. Respect individual perspective; you might disagree with a comment but do not attack the person.
3. Be brief in your comments.
4. Allow each person to finish.
5. Follow the direction of the moderator, including prompts “to finish up, please.”

It is important that the moderator or facilitator not comment on participants’ contributions.

The Discussion

Ask each person to provide a reaction or comment to the essay in 30 seconds.

Other sample questions to get a conversation started, also with the 30 second limit:

- What was the most startling, new, or surprising point made by the essay?
- How does the writer confirm or challenge the work we are doing, or the way in which we are doing it?
- What basic values or vision of community economic development is conveyed by this essay? Does it fit your values and vision?

Ask that the group **allow everyone to make one** contribution before anybody adds a second.

Tell the group: “**Don’t comment on others’ points**, even if your comment is positive.”

Consider **writing the contributions on flip chart paper or whiteboard** for all to see if this is a group that works together regularly. This is especially important if the conversation is part of a series, and this is the first among several discussion sessions that you want recorded. Taking notes in front of the group can also help identify topics to revisit if time allows.

However, it is tough to briefly capture accurately what people mean. So, **ask each person to help**. Here’s an example of how you, the facilitator, can capture the group’s most salient points:

Stop and think a minute about what you will say. You will have only 30 seconds — it’s longer than you think. To help the recorder, think about the newspaper headline for your 30 second comment. For example, If I am going to comment how racism causes all our problems and colors everything this organization does in this community, I might end by saying my headline is ‘be conscious of racism always.’

Enforce the 30 second limit (gently).

Allow a **short period for a second contribution** from anyone with a burning second point.

Then, **at the end, you could ask the group**:

“What do you think are the implications of this essay for your work?”

OR, if they share an organization, “What do you think are the implications of this essay for this organization?”

Before ending, if time allows, **feel free to refer to the whiteboard**, and ask:

“On which of these comments would you like to have more discussion now?”

Record the votes of the group and pick the most popular one. Set a time limit for the discussion. Remind them we are not trying to come to a conclusion, rather to open a dialogue.

Closing

You will want to **wrap up the conversation** in a way that doesn’t seek consensus or stifle the questions raised, but simply marks the end of your time together.

Think ahead of time and plan how you will draw the conversation to a close. What kind of closing exercise, if any, will you use?

Thank people for their participation and encourage them to continue the dialogue with other participants in the group, and/or to be back in touch with you about their reactions and suggestions for follow-up.

Sample closing questions:

- How was this conversation useful or exciting to you?
- What do you think we should do next with this discussion?
- Where do we go from here?

If you are facilitating a discussion among people in your own organization, a good question might be:

“What was one thing this discussion you think confirms or challenges the work of this organization?”

If you are in a multi-organization leadership setting, a good question might be:

“What was one thing from this discussion you think has the most impact on the field of community economic development?”

► SUPPLEMENT:

A guide for open discussions with a mixed group

Conversations at the level *Talking Values* intends are challenging for individuals just coming together for this conversation, as might happen at a conference, for example. The potential presence of an audience is also a challenge for the mixed-group format. We recommend having a skilled facilitator moderate such a discussion. That facilitator should know how to modify the design of this Discussion Guide for a mixed group setting.

The facilitator/moderator should be asked to model facilitation methods for mixed-group participants to use back home, when a trained facilitator is not available. The moderator should announce they are providing this model, by suggesting “what you see is a good way to conduct this conversation.”

In that context, suggest to participants “we want you to take in this experience from three perspectives.”

- Be a participant – share what you want to share.
- Think how you might share this experience with someone else.
 - ▶ What would you say that would make this kind of discussion attractive to them?
 - ▶ Of course, consider their vantage point on community development (CED staff, a banker, a funder, a board member). What might attract them to this conversation?
- Think of yourself as a facilitator back home – what method, guiding phrase, (“in a moment, I’m going to ...”), sequence of activity, or technique would you want to emulate?

In summary, mixed-group facilitation is more challenging than it might seem. We recommend having a trained facilitator for such a setting.

Questions to get the conversation started

It is also challenging to convene a conversation where the facilitator sets a topic or question rather than a general reflection session. The first challenge to setting an effective environment for that conversation is drafting a question that is specific enough yet opens the conversation rather than providing or forcing a quick answer.

- You will find sample questions at the end of each lead essay to use as a starting point.

AFTERWORD



PNC congratulates NACEDA on ten years of contributions to the community development field. We support the creation of this *Talking Values: Soulful Conversations Within Community Economic Development* because the conversations it is intended to stimulate will help frame the future of community economic development. Too often we are busy, busy, busy with immediate needs, deadlines and reports. My colleagues and I at PNC hope you carve out time and are inspired by these pages to have meaningful conversations about the future of community development and some of the complicated issues that surround it. We ask you to allow yourself the space for conversation, inspiration, and debate. Without it, our challenges will linger without resolution. Our successes will be less fulfilling and under-recognized.

Of course we believe in the critical role NACEDA and its network plays in our shared mission to bring opportunities for prosperity in all communities. But these conversations go beyond the reach of NACEDA and PNC.

I posed a question to NACEDA Board Member and Publication Chair Joe McNeely early in the development of this publication, "What will my ten closest colleagues and I be able to do with this document in the next six months?" I am a practical person. As such, I find the Discussion Guide to be the lynchpin that connects these concepts to people and organizations that can benefit from them most. Without the guide, the creative ideas and passionate values brought forward lose accountability. Use the Guide as a bridge to bring questions to your networks.

How will a new generation of leaders change the field? How do we balance scale and accountability? Are we taking the right approach to achieve racial equity in low-income places and communities of color? While I do not have the answers, the conversations this publication started have gotten me closer.

So I encourage you to make copies of your favorite essay. Prepare yourself with the Discussion Guide. Ask the board chair of your favorite local community organization to set aside 30 minutes at the start of your next board or committee meeting. Solicit honest opinions from your peers; offer your own. Then reflect on the values that come forward. Do the organizations you support align with those values? How? Why? Or why not?

I have had a 30-year career in this field and have encountered and supported many big ideas. A common thread running through the most transformative projects and programs is a community of individuals that asked the tough questions, drove impactful solutions to seemingly intractable disagreement, and had an accountable, proven process to meet shared goals.

We hope the people and ideas in these pages help you with that process.

Cathy Niederberger

Executive Vice President,
Community Development Banking
PNC Bank

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