

Common Vision Progress Report

OCTOBER 2007

Common Vision National Partners

Asian Americans/Pacific Islanders in Philanthropy
Association of Black Foundation Executives
Council on Foundations
Disability Funders Network
Diversity in Philanthropy Project
Environmental Grantmakers Association
Funders Concerned About AIDS
Funders for Lesbian and Gay Issues
Funders Network for Smart Growth and Livable Communities
Funders Network on Population, Reproductive Health & Rights
Hispanics in Philanthropy
Ms. Foundation for Women
Native Americans in Philanthropy
Philanthropic Initiative for Racial Equity
Philanthropy for Active Civic Engagement
Women and Philanthropy

Mission

Funders for Lesbian and Gay Issues seeks equality and rights for lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender and queer (LGBTQ) individuals and communities by mobilizing philanthropic resources that advance racial, economic and gender justice.



Common Vision Progress Report

Common Vision is a national, multi-year initiative that will convene grantmakers in various states and regions of the country who share an interest in creating healthy communities and widespread equity. Common Vision will facilitate a space for individual and institutional donors to meet one another, share insights, learn, collaborate and, ultimately, craft a philanthropic approach that tackles structural inequities, enhances the health of individuals and communities, and helps create a just, sustainable world.¹

The following report describes the background, design and implementation of Common Vision. It also includes findings from our two introductory meetings held in New England and the Midwest, and details next steps in Common Vision's evolution.

We invite you, your foundation and/or affinity group to join us and your colleagues in creating a common vision for healthy communities and widespread equity.

**For more information about Common Vision, please contact
Luz Guerra, program director at Funders for Lesbian and Gay Issues,
at 512-707-0060 or luz@lgbtfunders.org.**

A sector evolves, a project comes to life

Funders for Lesbian and Gay Issues initially conceived Common Vision as a project that would strengthen philanthropic support for the diverse spectrum of lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender and queer (LGBTQ) issues. We reasoned that this could be achieved by building regional networks to collectively explore how narrowly defined issues of sexual orientation and gender identity connect to broader concerns such as race, the environment, poverty and health, among others.

As many of you know, philanthropic learning communities and funder collaboratives are not new. Over the last three decades, grantmakers have established dozens of philanthropic infrastructure and affinity groups to help them strategize on how to maximize their effectiveness, address issues of shared interest and support communities left behind by our many institutions, including philanthropy.

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Further, countless progressive donors and foundations have been conducting multi-issue grantmaking for years, ensuring that all communities – especially the most marginalized among us – have the resources they need to bring about the change they envision. Increasingly, many of these leaders have begun espousing a vision to link our various political struggles, honor our differences, find common ground in our similarities, leverage our resources and build a broad-based movement for social change.

In recognition of these developments, Funders for Lesbian and Gay Issues transformed Common Vision from a program framed around LGBTQ issues into a partnership of national affinity groups and foundations working on broader issues of health and equity in our communities.

We want to promote a grantmaking model that demonstrates what's possible when we all work together towards a common vision.

Guiding principles and assumptions

Guiding Common Vision are several principles and assumptions:

- Pernicious inequities based on race, class, gender and sexuality, among others, persist in our country and in our world, creating hardship and limiting opportunity for individuals and communities.²
- In the United States, long-held historical inequities extend into philanthropy and the nonprofit sector; despite good intentions, many institutions often reify, instead of repair, society's disadvantages.³
- The narrow silos that have organized much of philanthropy in the U.S., as well as the lack of diversity at its helm, hinder the ability of grantmakers to support cross-cutting, multi-issue social change efforts.
- Grantmakers are eager to meet their colleagues and explore new grantmaking models and collaborations to effectively create equity.
- Supporting and connecting the dots is our goal—not duplicating or ignoring others' efforts. Our strategy for creating this connectedness is to partner with national affinity groups and foundations, and to convene funders at the regional and state levels, where many exciting initiatives are transpiring.
- Participatory evaluation—as well as home-grown leadership—is a central feature of our effort to learn, as well as to refine and replicate our common vision.
- A common vision for philanthropic social change will take time, commitment and coordination to flourish. Our aim is to design a process that strategically brings in national partners, experts in various fields and dedicated grantmakers to sustain this initiative and make it succeed.

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Designing a project

COMMON VISION OVERVIEW. Common Vision is a national, multi-year initiative that will convene grantmakers in various states and regions of the country who share an interest in creating healthy communities and widespread equity. The project has been launched in New England and the Midwest.⁴

FRAMEWORK. Common Vision utilizes the framework of “healthy communities and widespread equity.” Taken together, these concepts relate how the health of a community can only be enhanced for everyone when structural inequities are addressed and repaired. Typically, these inequities disproportionately affect people of color, poor and low-income people, women, and LGBTQ people, among others.

In the health sector, and mirrored in philanthropy, “healthy communities” as a framework has often been narrowly defined to mean only environmental, physical and mental health, while underestimating the impact of racial, economic and gender barriers on health outcomes. Common Vision disputes this frame by suggesting that health includes the economic vitality of communities, as well as the ways in which all community members are able to live healthy and productive lives. Here, our framework posits that as long as gross inequities—crushing poverty, structural racism, sexism and homophobia, etc.—persist in a community, its overall “health” remains in need of nourishment.

GOALS. Figure 1 depicts the goals of Common Vision, which are to create positive change at the individual, foundation and community levels. Over the course of two years, Common Vision will ❶ increase the knowledge, ❷ enhance the skill sets and ❸ strengthen the supportiveness of individual participants to better address the broad spectrum of equity and healthy community issues in their states and regions.

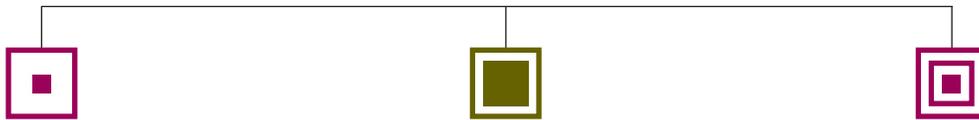
At the foundation level, our goal is to see an increase in ❶ the number of grants and ❷ the number of funders that support widespread equity and healthy communities. Finally, in the long term, the goal is to create healthy communities and widespread equity for all, supported by more strategic grantmaking.

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COMMON VISION

Healthy communities
and widespread equity
for all



INDIVIDUAL LEVEL CHANGE

Increased knowledge among Common Vision participants about the wide range of healthy community and widespread equity issues in their states and regions.

Enhanced skill sets among Common Vision participants to move their foundations to better support the wide range of healthy community and widespread equity issues in their states and regions.

Strengthened supportiveness among Common Vision participants for supporting the wide range of healthy community and widespread equity issues in their states and regions.

Collaborative relationships among funders in each region that support their collectively crafted theories of change, as well as other goals.

FOUNDATION LEVEL CHANGE

Increased number of grants that support healthy communities and widespread equity.

Increased number of funders that support healthy communities and widespread equity.

COMMUNITY LEVEL CHANGE

Healthy communities and widespread equity for all—supported by more strategic grantmaking.

PROGRAM MODEL. Over the course of two years, grantmakers in each region will meet roughly 5-7 times. Participants will meet with local activists, academics and nonprofits doing healthy community work; share strategies about successful grantmaking; collectively develop a theory of change for creating healthy communities and widespread equity; and model healthy community grantmaking by using a joint Common Vision fund, which will be established in each region.

Participants will have access to coaches and field experts, learn from data they identify as useful (provided by Common Vision staff), expand their networks and their analysis of the issues impacting their region, and inform the evaluation of the project to ensure that social change is attained and measured.

Local “catalyst committees” established in each region will work with Common Vision staff and national partners to refine and oversee the program.

Figure 1.
Common Vision Individual, Foundation
and Community-Level Goals

Learning from Evaluation

OVERVIEW. On July 11, 2007, 26 people—representing 18 foundations in four states—attended a preliminary Common Vision meeting for the New England region. The meeting was held in Manchester, New Hampshire. Three weeks later, on August 1, 2007, 36 grantmakers—representing 23 foundations in five states—attended a Midwest regional gathering in Chicago, Illinois.

Our intent for these meetings was to describe the Common Vision program, obtain feedback, and stimulate interest and buy-in. At each meeting, local Catalyst Committees were formed to serve as program advisors, engage in strategic outreach and prepare the regional group for the official launch, tentatively set for early 2008.

We also used these introductory meetings to illuminate three broad inquiries that will shape the work of each regional network over time:

- How do grantmakers understand and define—from their vantage point as funders—healthy communities and widespread equity?
- What is our common vision, and what are strategies for achieving it?
- What research and information would be useful to forge a regional or state grantmaking approach that integrates multiple issues and enhances our various communities?

In a healthy community with widespread equity, each person shares ownership and responsibility for the greater good of the community.

DEFINING HEALTHY COMMUNITIES AND WIDESPREAD EQUITY. From the definitions provided by the meetings' attendees, a few concepts emerged. According to these participants, a healthy community with widespread equity:

- Prioritizes health, broadly defined to include physical and mental health, the economy, and the environment. A healthy community with widespread equity would seek long-term healthiness in these areas while eliminating disparities among sub-groups.
- Actively works to eradicate racial, economic and gender-based barriers. A healthy community with widespread equity provides its members equal access and opportunity while nourishing the diversity of the whole.
- Understands "community" to mean a defined, geographic place as well as a set of people with shared characteristics. A healthy community with widespread equity honors how important a sense of community is to most people.
- Embodies productivity, efficiency and inclusiveness. In a healthy community with widespread equity, members work together to solve problems and prosper.
- Balances the needs of the community with the needs of the individual. In a healthy community with widespread equity, each person shares ownership and responsibility for the greater good of the community.

RESEARCH AND INFORMATION. A statistical overview on foundation grantmaking in their respective regions was offered to participants in both meetings. The presentation included an overview on foundations, foundation giving, comparison points on two social change issues (LGBTQ and environmental giving) and a closer lens on LGBTQ grantmaking in one state. The intent of this latter section was to illustrate the potential of collecting primary data on one specific issue in order to deepen our understanding of the grantmaking landscape. Data was presented on variables such as total foundations, total assets, total giving and gifts received.⁵

Following the presentation, attendees were asked to identify additional areas where they would like to see more information that would provide Common Vision participants the necessary learning to meet the goals of the project.

These interest areas included:

- A mapping of grantmaking efforts in their regions that depicts similar philanthropic efforts, in order to avoid unnecessary duplication;
- Detailed information on state and regional foundation giving to organizations working within a healthy communities and widespread equity framework. The data would identify gaps and opportunities;
- A review of organizations working within a healthy communities and widespread equity framework, which describes the sector and assists grantmakers in honing strategies for supporting these groups;
- Expert coaching on methods for collecting and analyzing grantmaking data, including how to identify grants that fit a "healthy communities and widespread equity" framework;
- Resources that portray the wide array of healthy community and equity issues, specific to a state and/or a region;
- Data on other funding streams, such as individual donors, government funding and corporate giving programs;
- Demographic data on populations residing in various states;
- A policy analysis of issues affecting marginalized groups in a given city, state and region; and
- Foundation data from different regions and states that facilitate an appropriate comparison.

FEEDBACK ON COMMON VISION. Based on feedback received on meeting evaluation forms, and in discussions held in each of the introductory meeting, grantmakers offered the following suggestions about the project:

- Ensure that a wide spectrum of affinity groups representing health, the environment, civic engagement and identity-based populations, among others, are co-leading the initiative actively and visibly. Otherwise, Common Vision will be mistakenly perceived as a narrow LGBTQ project and not one of "widespread equity."
- Ground the mantra of "healthy communities and widespread equity" in a concrete definition, supported by research findings and insights from the field.
- Clarify for grantmakers what it would mean to support "healthy communities and widespread equity" (i.e. examples of grantmaking that fit this construct).
- Allow for state-focused strategies so that funding networks that are working on enhancing foundation giving in their states have the opportunity to think about their states and their region.

- Deepen the research data on foundation grantmaking to include more information about organizations, policy concerns, and population demographics in a given region.
- Create opportunities for region-to-region information sharing, allowing for grantmakers in the Midwest, for example, to understand how their counterparts in New England—and in other regions—are addressing the wide spectrum of equity concerns.
- Present an agenda for potential Common Vision participants that details a two-year process. The agenda should convey dates, responsibilities and outcomes for each module in the project's lifespan.
- Facilitate a process where grantmakers are able to advise, help steer and ultimately own Common Vision in their states and regions.

Next steps

WORK WITH CATALYST COMMITTEES IN EACH REGION TO ENSURE LOCAL LEADERSHIP. Catalyst Committees comprised of 5-7 grantmakers from each region will advise the development and implementation of Common Vision in their geographic areas.

DEEPEN THE ROLE OF NATIONAL PARTNERS. We recognize that this project's success depend on thoroughly actualizing Common Vision as a collaborative project that models partnership across issues and identities.

IDENTIFY ADDITIONAL GRANTMAKERS IN EACH REGION TO ENSURE THAT COMMON VISION IS AS STRONG AND DIVERSE AS POSSIBLE. Catalyst Committee members, national partners and our other colleagues will help project staff recruit grantmakers in various states and regions so that the cohort comprising each region includes grantmakers representing a wide range of healthy community concerns.

COLLECT PRIMARY AND SECONDARY DATA ON FOUNDATION GIVING, POLICY NEEDS, POPULATION DEMOGRAPHICS AND ORGANIZATIONS TO PROVIDE A DETAILED LANDSCAPE OF EACH REGION. Prior to the first meeting in early 2008, Common Vision participants will receive detailed research in these areas. This resource will address many of the data interests that grantmakers identified in the introductory meetings.

CONVENE GRANTMAKERS IN A THIRD REGION OF THE COUNTRY BY THE END OF 2008. By drawing on the lessons learned from New England and the Midwest, we will add another region to Common Vision, eventually expanding its scope to reach the entire country.

MEASURE THE SUCCESS OF THIS COLLECTIVE ENDEAVOR AND ENSURE THAT PARTICIPATORY EVALUATION CONTINUES TO GUIDE OUR LEARNING. Because knowledge typically precedes real change, we will ensure that we systematically evaluate all aspects of Common Vision, drawing on the insights of participants and partners. We can all become better grantmakers.

Endnotes

¹ For a detailed definition of a healthy communities and widespread equity framework, as defined by FLGI and by philanthropic leaders in New England and the Midwest, please see pages 4 and 6, respectively.

² For example, the Annie E. Casey Foundation recently documented a number of these racial inequities in its toolkit, *Race Matters*. See The Annie E. Casey Foundation, *Race Matters* (Baltimore, MD: The Annie E. Casey Foundation, 2006).

³ See Will Pitz and Rinku Sen, *Short Changed: Foundation Giving and Communities of Color* (New York: Applied Research Center, 2004); Funders for Lesbian and Gay Issues, *Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender and Queer Grantmaking by U.S. Foundations* (New York: FLGI, 2007); and Asian American/Pacific Islanders in Philanthropy, *Growing Opportunities: Will Funding Follow the Rise in Foundation Assets and Growth of AAPI Populations?* (San Francisco: AAPIP, 2007).

⁴ To define the regions for Common Vision, we borrowed from the regional divisions outlined by the U.S. Census Bureau, modifying the configurations to consider demographic similarities and shared histories. New England includes Connecticut, Maine, Massachusetts, New Hampshire, Rhode Island and Vermont. The Midwest includes Illinois, Indiana, Iowa, Kansas, Michigan, Minnesota, Missouri, Nebraska, Ohio and Wisconsin.

⁵ For a copy of the Common Vision research maps for New England and the Midwest, please contact Funders for Lesbian and Gay Issues at 212-475-2930.



COMMON VISION

Healthy communities
and widespread equity
for all

A collaborative project of
Funders for Lesbian and Gay Issues

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