

Community Foundations and Resident Engagement **Stories from the Field**



October 2014

About CFLeads

CFLeads is the hub and go-to resource for community foundations seeking to make more impact in their communities through community leadership. As a national network, CFLeads supports and connects hundreds of community foundations across the country as they take on new roles, push their practices, and learn from the experiences of their peers.

Mission

CFLeads helps community foundations advance their community leadership practice to build thriving communities.

Vision

Community foundations take on challenging issues, engage residents, pursue cross-sector solutions to community problems, and marshal the needed resources to improve their communities and provide opportunity for all.

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Introduction

In August 2013, teams representing eight community foundations from around the nation — with CEOs, board members, senior staff, and community residents — came together in Beverly, Massachusetts, to begin a learning journey. Convened by CFLeads, a national organization that helps community foundations advance the practice of community leadership, these eight foundations committed to a year-long program, called the Resident Engagement Community Leadership Network, or CLN, that aimed to strengthen their ability to engage residents as full partners in the process of improving their neighborhoods and communities.

At a series of three multi-day work sessions between that August and the following May, the teams shared with each other their varying levels of experience with resident engagement, and brought issues and questions that colleagues in the CLN might help them resolve. Among the priorities the teams quickly defined for themselves was a desire to *tell their stories* — to share their initiatives with the community foundation field in a way that would vividly illustrate what they were seeking to achieve, and what they were learning along the way. CFLeads then engaged Doug Wilhelm, a Vermont writer who has worked with many nonprofit organizations, to develop and write a selection of nine stories drawn from the practices of the CLN.

The following pages feature those stories. They describe specific examples of resident engagement projects in a sampling of the forms these can take, along with accounts of how community foundations have succeeded in building understanding and support among staff, trustees and donors. These stories capture the journey that resident engagement can take — the challenges, victories and passions that can be involved, along with some models that are working and lessons that were learned.

The impetus for this learning journey was nearly a decade in the making. In 2005, the report *On the Brink of*

New Promise: The Future of U.S. Community Foundations, commissioned by the Charles Stewart Mott and Ford foundations, called for “creative and courageous leadership” in a time of great pressures for change. In the coming years, the report declared, “the measure that matters will be impact, not asset size.” In response, CFLeads joined with the Council on Foundations to lead a 30-member nationwide task force that produced the *Framework for Community Leadership by a Community Foundation*, a publication that sets out the building blocks of outcome-focused community leadership.

CFLeads then convened a 34-member Cultivating Community Engagement Panel, and worked with the panel to develop *Beyond the Brink: Engaging Residents. A New Call to Action for Community Foundations*. This report said that even as community foundations around the country develop new approaches to solving problems and meeting challenges, “a critical element — resident engagement — is largely missing.” The report defined resident engagement as involving “active, meaningful participation by the people who live in the neighborhoods where change is occurring.”

Stories from the Field shows how some of that active, meaningful participation can unfold. This publication accompanies two more from CFLeads: *Powerful Partners: Lessons from Community Foundations about Resident Engagement*, a report on the findings of the CLN, and the *Resident Engagement Guidebook*, which is designed to help community foundations explore their readiness to work more closely with residents. All three publications grew out of the work of the CLN, which, like the Cultivating Community Engagement Panel, was generously funded by the Charles Stewart Mott and W.K. Kellogg foundations.

In a time of great challenges facing our communities, we do need creative, courageous leadership from our community foundations. We believe you will find some of that in the stories that are presented here.

“Our Hearts Are In This”

Helping Neighbors Achieve Cleaner Air

To me, resident engagement means all hands on deck, working on behalf of the future of our community,” said Clotilde Perez-Bode Dedecker, President and CEO of the Community Foundation for Greater Buffalo. “*All hands* is the difference.

“Community foundations have been about *all philanthropists* on deck; all nonprofits, in a coordinated approach; even nonprofits, philanthropists and government in a coordinated approach. But the challenges facing our communities are too complex and too entrenched to be addressed by any one sector, or one organization. From a community-impact standpoint, everyone can contribute.

“Our first step,” the CEO said, “is to understand the resident-engagement ecosystem in our community as it stands — then find a place where we can add value.”

For the foundation and its board, the first learning experience in this approach was their involvement with a campaign that made history: the resident-driven push to clean the toxic air emissions from Tonawanda Coke.

“Nobody knew what it was”

This story essentially began one afternoon in 2006, when a routine blood test found that Jennifer Ratajczak’s white-blood-cell count was about 30 times above normal. A working mom of two grade schoolers in Tonawanda, a mostly suburban community just north of Buffalo, she’d been having mysterious health troubles — cysts in her throat, trembling muscles, and a general malaise — but specialists couldn’t find a cause. Then the test results brought a call from a doctor telling Ratajczak to leave work at once, and drive to an area cancer hospital.

The diagnosis was chronic myelogenous leukemia. The treatment was daily chemotherapy. While her husband Glenn continued working as manager of the local Erie County water-treatment plant, Jen left her job. That began a period of looking around her community.

Though she and Glenn had both grown up in Tonawanda, neither knew the source of the odor that hung in the air, during evenings especially. “There’s always been this smell,



“You too can have a voice”: As recent Lois Gibbs Fellows, these residents of Tonawanda, New York, and of Buffalo’s West Side received nine months of training in the skills of civic advocacy. The ongoing program, which is now self-sustaining, got started with funding from the Community Foundation for Greater Buffalo. Seated at center is Gibbs, the activist from nearby Niagara Falls who led the campaign to clean up the contaminated Love Canal in her neighborhood. Also seated are Ron Meegan (left) and Will Yelder. Standing are, from left: Hassan Dixon, Amaza Savage, Danielle Buccilli, Ron LaBuda, Marge Price, Rebecca Newberry of the Clean Air Coalition, and Kathie Capozzi.

our whole lives here," Glenn said. "Nobody knew what it was." When a doctor had asked Jen if she'd been exposed to benzene, a carcinogen that had been linked to her diagnosis, she didn't know what that was.

Now, she said, "I was more in touch with the daytime community, with other stay-at-home moms — and every store you'd walk into, there would be flyers for benefits." The fundraisers were for townspeople with leukemia, brain tumors, lymphoma. One of Jen's close friends had an inoperable brain tumor; a fellow mom had breast cancer. On a school trip, she noticed that 90% of the kids were listed as having asthma. A softball teammate of her 10-year-old daughter was diagnosed with leukemia. Jen discovered that on her street of 50 houses, she was one of five people with the disease.

Then one night, walking the dog, she watched her pet have yet another breathing attack as Jen held her nightgown over her own mouth. "That," she said, "was my 'ah-ha' moment."

Soon after, Glenn spotted a tiny newspaper ad. The New York Department of Environmental Conservation had just completed six months of local air monitoring, spurred by a local group that had done some air testing but failed to stay organized. The agency would be reporting its results at a community center.

"The DEC guys said they'd found five major toxins in the air, well over New York State guidelines — the worst being benzene," Glenn said. "Bells, whistles, everything went off in our heads. We were invited to a living-room meeting, with about 15 people. We got in a circle to tell our stories, and it was unbelievable: multiple cancers, respiratory illnesses, neurological illnesses, miscarriages.

"That was the beginning of the Clean Air Coalition."

"We're Going to Get Behind You"

Many residents of Tonawanda never cross under I-190 to explore the two-square-mile bulge of land between the highway and the Niagara River. Here a clutch of rundown mobile homes and a street of tiny, cube-shaped houses coexist with plants owned by GM, 3M, DuPont, Dunlop, the Tonawanda Coke Corporation and others. It was during World War II in this industrial area that uranium ore was enriched for the Manhattan Project. Today, 51 business facilities here have air-emission permits.

One of those was Tonawanda Coke, which for decades had been converting coal into coke, a purified form of the fuel, by cooking off impurities — including benzene — in high-temperature ovens. It wasn't long before the group of townspeople, from all across Tonawanda, who had formed

the Clean Air Coalition began to link the plant to the health crisis. "All indicators pointed there," said Glenn Ratajczak, whose home is four miles from the plant.

In 2009, using a simple testing kit, residents began to draw and test air samples. But they struggled to get funding and media coverage. Then they hired 22-year-old Erin Heaney, just out of Swarthmore College, who'd grown up in Buffalo and was passionate about environmental issues. As the coalition's new coordinator, Heaney began reaching out to the Community Foundation for Greater Buffalo.

"I knew they funded environmental work — not necessarily resident engagement, but environmental work," Heaney recalled. The foundation had indeed committed itself to an environmental focus. So far, that had involved supporting bike lanes and a green sewer project in Buffalo.

The community foundation first gave the Clean Air Coalition a small grant to support strategic planning. "There was a lot of passion" among the several dozen townspeople who by now were the coalition's core volunteers, Heaney said. "They had learned how to gather all this incredible data, all on their own. They'd begun to pressure officials. How could we turn that into the nuts and bolts of organizing? How do you actually become a player in the civic world?"

The foundation sent Heaney to a "boot camp" for CEOs of environmental nonprofits. Then it funded creation of the Lois Gibbs Fellowships — a new program that put a dozen local residents through a nine-month training, one Saturday each month, in the skills of civic change: media relations, canvassing, grassroots lobbying, campaign strategies and storytelling.

"This says to residents, 'You too can have a voice that will change the destiny of your community,'" said foundation CEO Dedecker. The fellowships are named for Lois Gibbs, the resident who led the campaign to clean up severe chemical-industry contamination in the Love Canal neighborhood of Niagara Falls, 10 miles from Tonawanda.

And even though the community foundation's support for the Clean Air Coalition was not huge in terms of dollars, "they were the first to say, 'We're going to get behind you,'" Heaney recalled. "That gave permission for other foundations to get behind us."

As the foundation got involved with the coalition, "we came upon this whole notion of environmental justice," recalled board Vice Chair Francisco Vasquez, Ph.D. "This moved us away from a comfort zone. The implications regarding Tonawanda Coke were concerning. I remember one board member taking quite a bit of time to ask, 'Why would we want to take on private enterprise?'"

"We did a lot of learning," he said. "We committed not to go on assumption, not to go on presumption, not to go on emotion, but to look at fact. You can only arrive there through exploring, questioning. I think our commitment to learn more allowed us to feel more comfortable with a decision." Ultimately, the board decided to continue supporting the Clean Air Coalition.

"The community foundation has a well-articulated community change strategy that says, 'Enhance and leverage significant environmental resources,'" Dedecker said. "The quality of air and water are at the top of our list. Anything that compromises that quality is the business of the community foundation, because the board says it is. Simple as that."

The foundation now plays a convening role in the Western New York Environmental Alliance, a coalition of more than 100 organizations, affiliates and supporters collaborating to restore, preserve and protect the region's environment. The Community Foundation for Greater Buffalo also brought its Tonawanda experience to the Resident Engagement Community Leadership Network — a year-long program that included eight community foundations and was coordinated by CFLeads, a national organization through which community foundations work together to advance community leadership practices. The CLN focused specifically on the practices of resident engagement.

"Skilling up' regular folks"

Next door to the coke plant in Tonawanda, an air-testing station found benzene levels running up to 75 times above the guideline set by the State of New York. After the Clean Air Coalition began appealing to the U.S. EPA and New York's Congressional delegation, the federal agency demanded that the plant open itself for official testing. The company ignored the order. In December 2009, the EPA raided the plant. Investigators found it was venting waste gases, including benzene, directly into the atmosphere.

In 2013, after a monthlong trial, Tonawanda Coke was found guilty on 11 counts, including violations of the Clean Air Act and the U.S. Resource Conservation and Recovery Act, plus obstruction of justice, and fined \$24.5 million. It was only the second criminal conviction in the history of the federal legislation's permit program, which was created in 1990.

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Today in his community, "benzene levels are down 86%," said Glenn Ratajczak. "To me, that's the real victory."

The coke company is appealing the court verdict, and the Clean Air Coalition continues to work locally. It has, Glenn said, "about 100 hard-core volunteers, about 500 casual members, and about

2,000 more who've been involved or supportive, one way or another." Volunteers on the "tech team" — a wide variety, from high school science teachers and students to retirees — monitor air quality, watch renewal dates on emission permits, put test results into language the community can understand, and train others in how to look up emission data for any community.

And at this point, three groups of about a dozen people each have completed training as Lois Gibbs Fellows. That program is sustaining itself without community foundation support.

"They invested in my leadership, and in the leadership of people who live in the neighborhood," Erin Heaney said of the foundation. "That was the most important thing they did."

The coalition, now with a staff of four, is also working with two low-income Buffalo neighborhoods that struggle with air pollution and high disease rates. And, Heaney said, "we have people calling us from neighborhoods all over the county and the region. There's more work to be done in terms of 'skilling up' regular folks. They want it.

"If you really are building the capacity of regular people, you don't get burned out, and you're able to do a lot of work with much less of a professional staff. And that's part of what helped us win — that it was real people from the neighborhood, telling their stories."

"Education, knowledge, a democratic approach, community involvement and strategic planning: that's our 'big stick,'" said Jen Ratajczak. With her cancer in remission, she continues to tell her story often. She and Glenn still volunteer many hours; but, said Glenn, "new people are constantly getting involved, so the work is not always falling on the same people.

"We realize things need to be made, we need a tax base, we need jobs," he reflected. "But this is 2014. We can coexist."

"We all have a stake in this. We're all at risk," his wife added. "What's great about working through the community is, our hearts are in this. We love our community."

“This Was Really an Eye-Opener”

Del Norte Teens Showed Adults What Resident Engagement Can Achieve

Imagine giving teenagers in an alternative high school, in one of the poorest counties in America, the power to work for the changes they want to see made. Where might that lead?

When this actually happened in California’s Del Norte County, one community leader who worried at first about the likely outcomes was Gary Blatnick, a Trustee of the Humboldt Area Foundation who until recently was the county’s Director of Health and Human Services. But what unfolded, he said, “has changed my thinking and my approach forever.”

The work he witnessed in Del Norte, which began in 2011 and continues today, “is some of the very best I have had the pleasure to be associated with over my career,” said Blatnick, who retired in 2014.

Del Norte is the northernmost of California’s coastal counties and it faces profound economic challenges, some three decades after its timber and fishing industries largely collapsed. The Humboldt Area Foundation serves Del Norte and more — a very rural piece of California that is as large as New Hampshire. Several years ago, Del Norte County and tribal lands were selected by The California Endowment as one of 14 communities to be involved in its 10-year Building Healthy Communities program. Here, the challenges around improving community health were clear: For example, childhood obesity in Del Norte had reached 40 percent, one of the highest rates in the nation.

The foundation engaged organizer Melissa Darnell to work in Del Norte using the PICO (People Improving Communities through Organizing) model (www.piconetwork.org), which focuses on engaging residents through churches, schools and community centers, seeking to build on values and relationships. For this initiative, Darnell found a receptive setting at Sunset High School, a small, 100-student “continuation school” serving students who did not thrive at the central Del Norte High School.



At Sunset High School in Del Norte, California, student organizers Maria Raya, at left, and Tori Wilkerson show off a chart that tracks the progress of their work.

Many Sunset students were people of color. Across the whole student body, many were coping with serious challenges in their own lives and families.

“In our county, just like other parts of the country, people of color are more likely to be suspended, expelled, caught up in juvenile justice, or be teen parents,” Darnell noted. But she discovered that most students loved Sunset High. They felt supported there, and their principal offered academic credit, in civics, for joining in the new initiative.

Darnell had no idea what issues she and the students might approach — that had to come from them. She began by having dozens of individual conversations. Out of those, particular concerns or ideas for improving school life began to emerge. The PICO process is very deliberate: Next, “with my support in the background,” Darnell said, “a small group of young people created an all-school meeting that they ran, to share the results of this work and invite the whole school to participate in the process.”

Students who showed strong interest in the project were invited to join in training sessions that focused on leadership. About 12 of them formed a committee that would lead and guide the ongoing process. They continued talking with other students, and “eventually determined that the priority issue they wanted to lift up was food,” Darnell said. They decided to advocate for healthier lunches.

While the larger Del Norte High had a daily salad bar and hot entrees, Sunset got prepackaged food, delivered to school. “Because none of the food we are served here at Sunset as part of the school meal program is prepared on site, it doesn’t taste as good and the texture of the food isn’t appetizing,” said junior Darian Sullivan. “Many things are

reheated and the temperature of the food is inconsistent, and meals or sides are often soggy and unappealing.”

The student leaders did their research. They compiled data on the effect of health and well-being on school performance, and they interviewed a local pediatrician, a nurse and top officials of the school system. Then, at a meeting with district school officials, they made their case.

“Misperceptions and negative stereotypes about who we are as a school and as students are common,” said Ben Thomas, a member of the organizing committee, in opening the session. “We are beginning to change that by holding this meeting.”

Said junior Cody Carpenter: “Eighty-four percent of us are on free or reduced lunch and don’t have the luxury to bring healthy food from home every day. If students aren’t well-fed here at school, many go hungry or substitute with unhealthy food like chips, cookies or energy drinks. This isn’t good for the health of anyone. We deserve a school lunch program that supports us and our dreams.”

The students asked for a full salad bar on the three days each week when the school was busiest, along with a hot daily entree. They won approval, that night, for every request. “You’ve effected a great change for Sunset High School,” Superintendent Don Olson told the students as he closed the meeting.

“If you listen to people, they will tell you”

That was in 2012. Since then, the project has broadened and expanded, moving beyond Sunset High School to involve more young people from across the community. The year after the food campaign, Sunset students won an allocation for new workout equipment, so they and their peers could get better exercise. Then the project moved its base from the school to a county youth-resource center.

“We started broadening the listening,” Darnell said. “We heard about a whole new set of issues: teen pregnancy, young adult homelessness, people who are self-medicating mental health issues. If you listen to people, they will tell you what they need, and what the real problems are.”

After a drunk driving accident killed two native women from the community, Del Norte’s young people chose their next issue: young people’s access to alcohol. They demonstrated to skeptical law enforcement officials how young people were stealing alcohol in large quantities from a local Safeway. In summer 2014, organizers presented

Initial goals are to “pick an issue that’s winnable, at least for the first couple ones, and build a sense of power within the community. That’s been our process.”

their project at a meeting of the county’s Board of Supervisors, where the Safeway manager described the resulting changes in his store. The audience responded with a standing ovation.

“Being involved in this kind of work brings out part of me that I never thought I had, to help others — so it means a lot,” said student organizer Mai Thao, who is of Hmong descent and has been involved in

the work since it began. “It makes me feel good that I’m here using my voice to help others who think they don’t have a voice to speak up.”

“Their lives will be forever impacted”

Taking lessons from the Del Norte experience, the Humboldt Area Foundation has broadened its community organizing work, engaging with adults and others in several more communities. It also joined in the Resident Engagement Community Leadership Network, a year-long program that included eight community foundations and was coordinated by CFLeads, a national organization through which community foundations work together to advance the practices of community leadership.

“We’re not setting the agenda,” said Executive Director Patrick Cleary. “We hire a community organizer; they go in, meet with the community and say, ‘What’s important to you?’” Initial goals, he said, are to “pick an issue that’s winnable, at least for the first couple ones, and build a sense of power within the community. That’s been our process.”

In Del Norte, foundation Trustee Gary Blatnick has been deeply impressed by what he has seen — and he’d like to see its lessons applied more widely.

“This was really an eye-opener,” he said. “What I’d like to see foundations do is to take these incredible success stories and work with system leaders, in understanding how we can change policies and programs to be far more effective than they currently are.”

Resident engagement — the approach that centers on helping community members identify the changes they want to see, then supporting them in pursuing those goals — is “exactly what I’m driving at,” Blatnick said.

“Being able to actually see it in action was enlightening. Not only did I see young people creating change for their community and in their school — I saw on their faces and heard in their words that they were personally changed by this. And their lives will be forever positively impacted by those experiences.”

Showing Donors What Their Dollars Do

Baltimore Community Foundation Does Some Powerful Connecting

Donor satisfaction is vital for community foundations. Donors who are more satisfied with their community foundation are more likely to indicate that they plan to continue giving and more likely to recommend the foundation to others.

The strongest predictors of donor satisfaction are donors' sense of the foundation's level of responsiveness when they need assistance and donors' perceptions of the foundation's impact on the community.

— **What Donors Value**, a 2014 report by *The Center for Effective Philanthropy*, on findings from a survey of 6,086 community-foundation donors



During the tour that brought donors to the Baltimore Community Foundation into the Reservoir Hill neighborhood, donor Barbara Shapiro (in foreground) talks with Alison Worman, farm manager of Whitelock Community Farm (in straw hat). Looking on, from left, are Richard Gwynallen, Associate Director of the Reservoir Hill Improvement Council; Jesse Cowling, Donor Services Officer at the community foundation; and Carl Cleary, Housing Coordinator for the Reservoir Hill Improvement Council.

For the past three years, the Baltimore Community Foundation has worked across departmental lines to build new awareness among donors of what BCF is doing with their money — what the funds and projects involved have achieved. Periodically through the year, program and donor services staff collaborate on roundtable discussions and 20-minute call-in updates. They also produce a yearly report, *It's All Thanks to You* (www.bcf.org/Portals/0/Uploads/Documents/Public/2014_CLF_IIB_web.pdf).

But the interactive bus tour that staff offered donors last fall had the potential to take this effort to a new level, by directly engaging supporters with residents involved in a neighborhood's revival. The tour could do that. If anyone came.

"We thought we'd be lucky if we got one small minibus of people — 15 or 20," said Ralph Serpe, Vice President for Development. "We wound up getting three buses, with 65 people signed up."

The tour was the main feature of the foundation's annual donor gathering in November 2013. As supporters arrived, they filled buses that took them to Reservoir Hill, a historic Baltimore neighborhood whose comeback from struggling times the foundation has been assisting through multiple initiatives. BCF has not led or shaped projects; it has, instead, funded and supported those developed by residents

of the neighborhood. The foundation has invested in a neighborhood grants program, leadership development for volunteers, loans to help homeowners invest in the neighborhood, educational partnerships, and efforts to promote gardening, recycling and energy conservation.

At each of several stops on the tour, residents boarded the bus to tell donors about efforts in which they'd been active. "They talked about how they were doing their work, how BCF support was beneficial to them. And then they took questions," said Dion Cartwright, Program Officer for Neighborhoods.

Added Serpe: "We brought people on the bus who were engaged in saying, 'Oh my gosh, we love our neighborhood! We show our love by doing community gardens, by cleaning

trash, by volunteering for the local synagogue, all these things.' And the community foundation has helped to bring these people together, helped them get excited about contributing."

Later, as donors gathered for a reception and dinner, he said, "we had images around the room from the tour: pictures from the neighborhood, pictures of people who were on the tour, on easels all around the room. So they were able to learn more about the people they had just met."

"Our best year ever"

"I was impressed," said Barbara Shapiro, a foundation supporter who recently created The Mitzvah Fund through BCF, inviting very simple proposals for small grants to support community projects. "I think they should do it again — and this time invite the residents to the cocktail party!"

"When you're on a large board, particularly a community foundation as opposed to a private foundation, you're not necessarily involved in everything the organization is doing," noted Sheldon Goldseker, a Trustee since BCF's inception, whose family foundation has been a major supporter and ally of BCF since 1979. "So when the community foundation said they were putting together a bus tour, I thought, 'Wow — I'd love to do this.' Anything that's educational to both the board and donors is going to presumably result in better returns, and in more involvement of donors and philanthropists."

That increase in donor support appears to be just what's happening for the Baltimore Community Foundation. For its part, the Goldseker Foundation recently announced it would make the largest grant in its 39-year history — a \$1.5 million grant to the community foundation, in part to support BCF's work in city neighborhoods.

Overall, after assessing the financial impact of the community foundation's year-long, integrated approach to better informing and engaging donors, "we know two things," said Ralph Serpe. "We know that we raise money on an annual basis for our civic leadership work, and that we had our best year ever last year. We had more donors than ever, and we raised about \$1.5 million. I don't know what the numbers are across the country, but I would dare to say that the BCF raises just about as much as any community foundation to support its civic leadership work. And the only way we can do that is to show people what we do with the money we raise."

Second, in major-gift fundraising, "we have had more personal visits with major donor prospects in the past 36 months than we have had, ever. So this strategy is working

for us," said Serpe, who is the founder and coordinator of the Unrestricted Asset Development Peer Group, a coalition of community foundation development leaders.

"We have come a long way"

"This approach we are taking — of using an engagement lens to cultivate donors — that's the story," said Program Officer Cartwright. "I don't think we're necessarily the best at it right now, but we've taken an approach that could really turn out to be something big."

"We have come a long way on that score," said Tom Wilcox, the foundation's President and CEO. Along with staff leadership, he credits the education and inspiration that a BCF team drew from the Resident Engagement Community Leadership Network.

The year-long program was facilitated by CFLeads, a national organization through which community foundations work together to advance community leadership practices. Focused on the practices of resident engagement, the network brought together teams from eight community foundations around the country, to share experience and problem-solve around this approach of empowering residents to make the changes they desire.

"Contemporaneously with this work, we have figured out what it costs to go deeply into a neighborhood, and engage the many elements necessary to give it the tools to be self-sustaining in its growth," Wilcox said. "As a result of the CFLeads work, we're definitely doing more to bring unlikely partners together, and to generate the resources to effect the change."

The foundation's Neighborhood Grants Program is gaining wider notice. It's the focus of a July 2014 news report published online by the Charles Stewart Mott Foundation (www.mott.org/news/news/2014/20140715-Baltimore-Community-Foundation). The article notes that BCF "has granted \$3.3 million to hundreds of organizations working to strengthen Baltimore's neighborhoods so they are safe, vibrant, clean and green ... In addition to having a host of donors from the greater Baltimore area and throughout the state of Maryland, BCF frequently links with foundations around the country.

"National funders come into local communities with all kinds of ideas that meet with a greater or lesser degree of success," the article quotes CEO Wilcox as saying. "Obviously, the neighborhoods small grants program was one of the great ones. When you get one that works well, you make it part of the way you do things. That's what we did here in Baltimore."

Helping a Foundation Staff Make More of a Difference

Learning to Engage “All the Entities that Make up a Community”

Soon after Ivey Allen became President of the Foundation for the Mid South in 2006, she heard some startling feedback at a community meeting in Greenwood, Mississippi. Her staff had been working with residents there for more than three years, convening discussions and bringing in consultants to assess how local people’s goals for positive change could be met.

“As I went around,” she recalled, “the residents said, ‘We’re so tired of y’all. All we ever do is meet and eat, meet and eat — but nothing’s happened! And you keep getting people in to help us, versus letting us do some of the work.’”

“I couldn’t blame them for being restless. So I took some time to sit with the staff. I said, ‘What are we doing?’”

With a staff of 12, this community foundation serves Arkansas, Louisiana and Mississippi — “a daunting task,” its website notes, “because the Mid South is home to 30% of the nation’s poverty, which has eroded the well-being of our communities, our education and health systems, and financial security.” Program staff had been working in several targeted communities, including Greenwood, to help residents set out and pursue goals for community improvement.

After the meeting in Greenwood, Dr. Allen — a Mississippi Delta native, she holds a Ph.D. from Columbia, and had previously directed fellowship programs for the Rockefeller Brothers Fund — began to work closely with her program staff. She asked leading questions, examined consultants’ reports, and began a process — which did involve some tension — that centered on bringing to the table those community members, and leaders, who could help accomplish the changes that local residents wanted to see.

“This became an example of how to do our work,” recalled Dwanda Moore, Program Officer for Health and Wellness. In one community, she said, residents had called for particular road and highway improvements. “So the question was, ‘Do we have municipal leaders here? Do we have the Department of Transportation? Do we have the people who can really make a decision?’”

“When we talk about resident engagement,” Moore



Brainstorming together for the Foundation for the Mid South are, from left: President Ivey Allen, Board Chair Kay Kelly Arnold, and Program Officer Dwanda Moore.

explained, “we’re talking about all the entities that make up a community: individual residents, civic organizations, community leaders, faith-based organizations, the business sector. We’re trying to make sure we’re approaching it holistically.”

Dr. Allen, she said, helped the staff reconsider its work by “asking specific questions. ‘Have you tried this? Who’s at the table?’ Really helping us think the process through. As I think about it now, we were learning resident engagement, she was teaching resident engagement — but we didn’t know it at the time.”

“How do we get this done?”

“Retraining the staff was a key challenge: bringing them around to see,” Dr. Allen recalled. “I also went to the communities with them, not as an active participant but as an observer, so I could watch and coach. Ultimately, some chose to leave, or were reassigned. But my question was

always, 'Who do we need to help make this happen?' That didn't get to criticizing someone's idea; it was, 'How do we get this done?'

"For us," she added, "it's about ensuring that a broad cross-section of voices in our community is heard — that it's the residents, not the foundation, saying what their needs are and how they want to address them. People say, 'We need new housing,' or 'We need jobs.' Well, how do you see the pathway for us helping you to make that happen?"

Learning to do resident engagement in this way has helped the whole staff work more effectively together, observed Denise Ellis, the Grants and Technology Manager, who joined the foundation three years after its creation in 1989.

"We have done a much better job of working collectively in our program areas," she said. "You have program officers going into the communities, working with engaged citizens and convening groups of people that maybe had never sat down and talked before. You've got municipal leaders talking with engaged citizens, or with citizens wanting to be engaged in improving their communities."

"This is what was missing"

At present, for example, Program Officer Moore is working with residents of East Jerusalem, a small, urban community within the city of Hattiesburg, Mississippi, where most residents live below the poverty line. The project's goal is to reduce rates of obesity and diabetes, in part by finding ways to make more fresh, healthy produce available to all residents.

That aim grew out of an assessment that residents did themselves, after the foundation had done some work to help East Jerusalem recover from Hurricane Katrina.

"They came to us and said, 'Hey, we've done this assessment, and what we want as a community is access to fresh fruits and vegetables,'" Moore said. Drawing on learning experiences from Greenwood and from the storm recovery, "I was able to say, 'This is what was missing from the table.'"

*"For me, it was important that the local people own it. That's the only way it will be sustainable. You can facilitate it, you can get the right people into the room. But *they* are figuring out how to work together."*

"We were looking at local partners first. But then we thought about how we could create opportunities to bridge the gap between residents and other community partners, such as the City Council, the mayor and the local university."

In August 2013, a team of Mid South staff members and trustees shared that challenge at the first work session of the Resident Engagement Community Leadership Network. That year-long

program included eight community foundations and was coordinated by CFLeads, a national organization through which community foundations work together to advance community leadership practices.

Back in East Jerusalem in December, with ideas gleaned from that gathering, "We held a community meeting attended by residents, city workers, faith leaders and a city councilwoman — she'd been a missing link through this process," Moore said. "Second, we had a meeting with the mayor and his staff to talk about what's happening in East Jerusalem. We expanded our conversation to the Health Department and other health leaders in the community."

The goal is to reduce obesity and diabetes by 10% in the local population. As the collaboration comes together, "I'm really happy with the progress," said the program officer. "We needed the people who can make things happen to really listen to the residents."

The Foundation for the Mid South has four priority areas: education, health and wellness, wealth building and community development. "We take the same approach in all these areas," Ivye Allen said. "You cannot serve such a broad geography trying to do it yourself. For me, it was important that the local people own it. That's the only way it will be sustainable. You can facilitate it, you can get the right people into the room. But *they* are figuring out how to work together."

"This is a field that can be easily romanticized, but it's hard work, and you fail often," noted Kay Kelly Arnold of Little Rock, Arkansas, who chairs the foundation's board and joined its team for the Community Leadership Network. "At the end of the day, you want to do something that makes a difference."

Bringing the Board on Board

How Trustees Are Helping Each Other Understand Resident Engagement

When a community foundation tests the potential in a new approach to making a difference, one challenge can be to develop understanding and support on the board. And, of course, trustees bring widely varying backgrounds and perspectives to a conversation like that.

At The Denver Foundation, for example, Virginia Bayless's expertise is in finance. So she struggled at first to grasp what staff members meant by resident engagement, which centers on engaging those who live in a neighborhood or community, first in identifying the changes they want to see and then in working to achieve the goals they've set.

"Resident engagement has vocabulary that people in the field use, that the rest of the world doesn't," she said with a laugh. "I'd say, 'I don't know what you're talking about!'"

But after chairing the Philanthropic Leadership Committee, Bayless grew enthused enough that she joined The Denver Foundation's team for the Resident Engagement Community Leadership Network — a year-long program that included eight community foundations and was coordinated by CFLeads, a national organization through which community foundations work together to advance community leadership practices.

At three multi-day work sessions during the year-long program, teams shared their experiences with resident engagement and helped each other problem-solve. As a team member from the Fremont Area Community Foundation in

"We're talking about a fundamental change in how we do our work: going directly to people who will be affected. I was really pleased to see trustees get energized around that."

western Michigan, Trustee Hendrick "Hank" Jones, a retired plant supervisor for the Gerber Products Company, brought an enthusiasm rooted in Scripture. "One of the things that really excites me is, as the Bible says, 'Know them which labor among you,'" he said. "And that takes a commitment that goes beyond charity work.

"A lot of people do good charity work," he explained, "and they get a good feeling that they've done a good deed — but resident engagement calls for a commitment of time and effort that goes beyond good feeling. It puts a face on what you're doing, because you're talking directly to people in need."

"Hank talked to trustees with a passion that got people excited," said Carla Roberts, CEO of the Fremont Area Community Foundation. "We're talking about a fundamental change in how we do our work: going directly to people who will be affected. I was really pleased to see trustees get energized around that."

At The Denver Foundation, where the program staff

now routinely uses resident engagement in its neighborhood work, Virginia Bayless now says, "I totally buy into this." This summer she helped shape a program that introduced her fellow trustees to resident engagement. First, presenters defined its terms; then they invited board members to describe how they may have used this approach themselves, to promote change in their own family, workplace or community.

"I'm not naive enough to hope that everyone on the board will engage as deeply



Listening closely to a discussion at a work session of the Resident Engagement Community Leadership Network are Clotilde Dedecker, President and CEO of the Foundation for Greater Buffalo (at left), with foundation Trustee Danis Gehl.

as others with this," she said. "But if we can help people think at the level of supporting those who are impacted by issues in coming up with the solutions, then those solutions will be so much more sustainable, and have so much more impact, than if the foundation just doles out money when people ask for it."

"You start to see a thread"

Trustees are "full into the conversation" about this approach at the Community Foundation for Greater Buffalo, said another member of the Community Leadership Network, Board Vice Chair Francisco Vasquez, Ph.D. "This is really turning to where we're seeing residents as ends, rather than as means. Looking at them as the ends respects their

"Let's Do Lunch"

Amarillo Area Foundation Tests a Low-Key Way of Engaging Trustees

As a setting for introducing and discussing a different approach to bringing about change in a community, a foundation board room may not be the most relaxing choice.

It's an imposing group of trustees, for example, that works through packed agendas for the Amarillo Area Foundation, which serves 26 counties in northwest Texas. "You really have the absolute top leaders of our community in there," said Treasurer Puff Niegos. "Even I'm intimidated sometimes."

So when a team of foundation leaders and trustees who had been involved in the year-long Resident Engagement Community Leadership Network, or CLN, talking and learning with delegations from seven other community foundations, sought to introduce their full board to the notion of resident engagement, they tried something new. They steered clear of the board room.

Instead they set up a series of relaxed, small-group lunches at the Amarillo Club, with four or five trustees at each. There they made their case, and invited questions.

"It was an absolutely wonderful beginning, because we got to have closer conversations," said Trustee and past Chair Alice O'Brien. "We had people who said, 'Wait a minute — why would we want to do that?' And others who said, 'I can see why.'"

"Have you talked to people?"

Though it takes varying forms as different community foundations employ the approach, resident engagement centers on the idea that for change in a neighborhood or community to be sustainable, it must come from within. So a community foundation may work directly with those who live in a target neighborhood or community — first in determining what changes they wish to see achieved,

then in helping them become key players in reaching those goals.

"It's not just showing up and saying, 'What do you want?' It's really engaging," said Niegos. At the luncheons, she and foundation CEO Clay Stribling described the approach and cited examples from the CLN, which was coordinated by the nonprofit CFLeads.

"We started with background, how we got involved," Niegos said. "We talked about what some of the other foundations have done; then we moved into, 'How do you see our foundation engaging residents?' We got some great feedback. This was great education. And we're going to have to continue that education as we move forward."

Some weeks earlier, foundation staff had first sought to introduce resident engagement at a full board meeting, by presenting their concept for a project that would center on working with candid photographs Amarillo teens had taken of their community as they knew it. The board was skeptical; so Stribling and Niegos decided to step back and set up the more relaxed, small-group discussions.

"We tried to lay out the conversation in the same way for each group," Stribling said — "but each group took the conversation in a drastically different direction. And that's what I wanted."

Going forward, the CEO hopes "to get the board thinking about this related to everything we do." If he or his staff introduces a new initiative, he hopes the board will ask, "Have you been in the community? Have you talked to people about whether there's a need? Have you really gone out there and asked the right questions? It's about highlighting, 'Here's a new program, and here's what we've done to engage the community' — so the board is asking me those questions *before* we roll it out."

agency. It respects them as people, as the players in their community life," said Dr. Vasquez, who is CEO of Child and Family Services, a Buffalo nonprofit agency.

The board's talks are part of its larger conversation about the foundation's role in the greater Buffalo community at a time of meaningful economic development, noted Trustee Danis Gehl, Ph.D.

"Our conversations have been on reducing inequities and disparities, and on building capacity within marginalized communities," said Dr. Gehl, who is Associate Executive Director and Director of Education at the University of Buffalo's Educational Opportunity Center. "You start to see a thread. In order for change to occur on these fronts, it really has to happen at the level of the people on the front lines — so people move from being beneficiaries to being agents of their own change."

"What I'm trying to figure out," she continued, "is, okay, what is the risk factor to the foundation in this work, in stepping back and letting people do their own thing? You want to protect the investment of your donors in your activities as an organization — but people learn by doing."

She believes the Buffalo board's openness to learning in general has been aided by its commitment to diversity, and by an ongoing project in which trustees share personal stories of how they got to where they are in their lives.

"I'm relishing this time, because I feel that in many ways this is a pivotal point in the community foundation's life," said Dr. Vasquez.

"Being able to do that, to open ourselves up to hear each other's stories, creates a safe space," she said. "And being able to create a space where board members can have honest conversations about this work, which their foundation is engaging with, is critical."

"This is a pivotal point"

Trustee Ellen Bernard of the Baltimore Community Foundation agrees.

"I think many of us take for granted the opportunities we have to engage in our neighborhoods," said Bernard, a founding member of the Baltimore Women's Giving Circle. "But many people don't have that opportunity. Neighborhood associations aren't always in place. Community organizing hasn't always happened. And often, residents' priorities are different from those of funders."

At the Buffalo foundation, "I'm relishing this time, because I feel that in many ways this is a pivotal point in the community foundation's life," said Dr. Vasquez. "I think we're on the cusp of something great — but we need to get over ourselves. Maybe we need to venture into a high-crime area, where moms and dads are trying to raise their kids and protect their kids, and really come to grips with the reality we see before us."

"We need to learn how to engage in conversations across barriers of race, power and other influences," he summed up. "We have to define our role in how we engage with those who are marginalized in our society, so we can best use our resources. I think a major challenge for us is to immerse ourselves in the good, bad and ugly of that — to really test our assumptions and commit ourselves to learning."

“We’re All Community Builders”

Aligning Staff at Community Foundations Around a Common Purpose

At a recent workshop for top officers of community foundations, several agreed that it can be daunting to try to break through the functional “silos” that can keep staff departments from working as well as possible together.

“When you really start to focus on your organization, especially on the interaction between programs and donor services: historically, that has been a brick wall,” said one CEO. “They always seem to have friction.”

“Management has the responsibility to put in place processes and structure that require collaboration,” said a chief operating officer at another foundation.

At the workshop, two community foundation leaders sparked much interest among their peers by sharing new approaches to “silo busting” that they’ve employed with some evident success. The session came amid a gathering of the Resident Engagement Community Leadership Network, a year-long program convened by CFLeads, a national organization through which community foundations work to advance community leadership practices.

At The Denver Foundation, years of work with resident engagement — the practice of inviting all residents of a neighborhood or community to become key players in solving the problems they want to address — prompted

foundation leaders to ask how they could align their whole organization, with some 40 staff members, around a similar commitment to achieving shared goals.

“We decided as part of our new strategic plan that we wanted to infuse resident engagement in everything we do,” said CEO David Miller. “That’s a pretty dramatic change in our culture.”

As they prepared for a staff retreat to kick off this effort, Miller and his planning committee saw there was some resistance, as colleagues wondered how the initiative would affect them. They also saw that segments of the staff tended to feel they were working in isolation, without wider support, on three key objectives of the foundation: fundraising, racial equity, and engaging community members in making positive change.

That was a pivotal insight. “We’re seeking to integrate all three of those, so that we’re *all* community builders and we’re all fundraisers,” said Lauren Casteel, Vice President of Philanthropic Partnerships, quoting Roque Barros, a community advisor and consultant who worked with the Community Leadership Network. Centering on that goal, Denver’s staff retreat “had great energy,” she said. “People were really open to it.”

At the Fremont Area Community Foundation in western



Talking and listening together at The Denver Foundation's staff retreat are, from left, President and CEO David Miller with staff members Leah Parsons, Natalie Rooks, John Mills, Kelly Purdy and Kate Lyda.

Michigan, “donor services and grantmaking need to go hand-in-hand in this work we’re doing,” said CEO Carla Roberts. In the three years since she assumed her post, Roberts has trained her staff in a consensus-building process that offers everyone a voice — and she has put in place a new organizational chart that promotes working relationships across departmental lines.

“Everything is set up to do teamwork,” she summed up. “We’re not siloed any more.”

How has this worked in practice? How have these two foundations made strides in building better connectedness across the segments of their staff?

“People have the wisdom”

One key, Carla Roberts believes, is broadening the process of leadership. When she became the Fremont CEO, she brought what she calls “my own philanthropic and leadership style, that’s developed over a career. I just believe that people have the wisdom and knowledge to resolve their own issues, if you give them a chance to participate in the process.”

She asked staff members from the different departments to go through a training in Technology of Participation, a facilitation method offered by the Institute of Cultural Affairs. It centers, she explained, on “working with people to help them reach consensus, and helping them be inspired to take action on what they’ve agreed on.”

Roberts also created new, cross-departmental teams; rotated leadership of the regular staff meeting; and — after much thought and searching for the right model — put in place a new organizational chart that connects the vice presidents of philanthropic services and of community investment as equal partners in Community Services.

“This puts fund development and grantmaking into a matrix-management relationship, where they need to collaborate,” the CEO explained. “We’ve got Supporting Services coming down the vertical side, and Community Services going across the top — and their staffs are intermingled.

“I’d been thinking about this for over a decade,” she added. “It’s a way of disbursing leadership throughout the organization.”

At first, there was some resistance to the changes. But these days, said Kathy Pope, Vice President of Finance at the Fremont Area Community Foundation, “the staff feels like they’re more included in what’s going on. Carla’s leadership is inclusive, and she tries to empower staff to make decisions without having to run everything by her.”

“We’d all like to get better”

In Denver, as the planning team prepared for the staff retreat, “issues of race and color really bubbled to the surface,” said Adrienne Mansanares, Director of Community Leadership. “We have a really diverse staff. We decided to focus the retreat on our three core commitments: advancing racial equity, engaging residents, and developing philanthropy.

“The way we framed our retreat is that everybody in the foundation, in their job and in their personal life, has in some way done those three things. We’re all doing them — and over time, we’d all like to get better at doing them. The internal breaking down of silos is that our donor services staff should be comfortable working in all these spheres, and our program people should be just as comfortable.”

The planners paired up everyone on staff with someone from another department. In advance of the retreat, each was asked to interview the other, drawing on an interview guide provided.

At the retreat itself, with help from a skilled facilitator, staff members shared elements of themselves and their lives in personal displays. Staff visited tables where colleagues expressed how they had honored each of the core commitments on the job, often in unexpected ways. Then an artist helped the whole staff envision the three commitments as trees, drawn on the spot: the trunks as basic values, the branches as what’s being done now, and clouds above as “what we want to do in the next year.”

“It was a spectacular day — and it was very well-received,” Mansanares said. “All the feedback was good.” Small, cross-departmental teams are now working to implement action steps mapped out at the retreat.

A key result of the retreat project, said Lauren Casteel, is that a common thread now links the donor services and program staff: Each has discovered that the other believes in resident engagement. “Our donor services staff believes in it because donors are residents, and they drive the decision-making about how they want to give,” she said. “That’s how we treat our donors — and that’s how we would like our nonprofit grantees to think about the people who are receiving services.

“People who receive services, who are most impacted by an issue, should not only be providing input into any solution. They should also be acting on those solutions, and driving them forward so that they become the agent.

“When donors and residents are both deeply moved to act on an issue, a community foundation can bring them together,” Casteel concluded. “That’s when we can find lasting solutions.”

Creating Connections that Change Lives

How Boulder County's Foundation Is Working with Its Latino Community

In the years since trustees of The Community Foundation Serving Boulder County, in Colorado, decided in 2008 to launch a major initiative that has begun to help close the “achievement gap” between young Anglo and Latino students in the county, two strategic moves have proven to be key.

The first, said President Josie Heath, was engaging a highly regarded leader from the Latino community in shaping the project — first as a valued advisor, then as a trustee whose contribution has been extraordinary.

Heath described the second as an “ah-ha” moment. It was realizing, as part of the Resident Engagement Community Leadership Network, that a vital piece of enabling more Latino children to succeed in school was to engage directly with their parents — and to build trusting relationships, one family at a time.

This story sums up those two breakthroughs. The first began when Josie Heath invited Richard Garcia to come talk with her board.

“He’s very much trusted”

Most students from lower-income backgrounds in Boulder County are Latino, and Heath knew Garcia as a highly regarded activist in that community. His primary focus is on early childhood education. He founded and directs a statewide nonprofit whose main program, PASO (Providers Advancing School Outcomes), provides unlicensed child care providers, most of them Latino, with the skills,

A vital piece of enabling more Latino children to succeed in school was to engage directly with their parents — and to build trusting relationships, one family at a time.

materials and knowledge they need to help children truly learn.

“He’s a real voice in the community, and he’s very much trusted by everyone,” said Dalia Dorta, a local Latina activist.

After a careful process, the foundation’s board had settled on school readiness and early childhood education as key to closing the achievement gap. “I thought about Richard as a resource,” Heath recalled.

“He came into a meeting, and brought some folks from his program. I was a little anxious about it — but he did such a beautiful job of capturing what he was doing, of what could be done with an investment in those early years. He just had a depth, and a kind of wisdom, about this topic that was very persuasive.”

That meeting led to several more. Garcia helped shape the School Readiness Initiative that the foundation launched in 2008, with a major commitment of resources and a full-time director. In 2009, he joined the foundation’s board, and he served as its chair for a year as the initiative moved forward.

“He really helped us think it through in a very authentic way, so that we connected with the Latino community and understood it better,” said Trustee Jane McConnell, who



Richard Garcia, Trustee of The Community Foundation Serving Boulder County, leads a brainstorming session at a forum for Latino parents on how to help their children succeed in school.

co-chairs the School Readiness Initiative.

The project has been very active. “We have run awareness campaigns, financed and led campaigns on four education funding measures, and made this work a major focus of our TRENDS Report on the social and economic health of our county,” reported Chris Barge, who directs the initiative.

“We are seeing really strong gains”

The work has begun to show results. In 2010 and again in 2013, as part of statewide standard-assessment testing, the county’s two school districts, Boulder Valley and St. Vrain, collected data on how many third graders were reading at grade level. That achievement is “the most important predictor of high school graduation and career success,” says the nationwide Campaign for Grade-Level Reading, a research-based effort by foundations, nonprofits, states and communities.

The districts compared the percentage of all third graders who were reading at grade level to those meeting the standard who were receiving meal assistance, a lower-income group that, in Boulder County, includes mostly Latinos. Between 2010 and 2013, the grade-level reading gap between all students and those on meal assistance shrank from 40 to 30 points in Boulder Valley. Between 2009 and 2013 in St. Vrain, the same measure decreased from 25 to 19 points.

The progress has not been without setbacks: In 2014, the same assessment found that third-grade reading scores had dropped four percentage points among all students receiving meal assistance. But overall, “We are seeing really strong gains among our Latino students,” observed John Creighton, a foundation Trustee who is the School Board President in St. Vrain School District, which has a large Latino population.

“The early years are so critical, and the community foundation was a key player in St. Vrain being able to expand what we’re doing in early childhood education,” he said. “Our community now sees early education as a priority.”

As the School Readiness Initiative developed, Richard Garcia “continued to be such a great resource that I think he carried a lot of weight,” Heath said. “People kept coming back to him, because he had such great insight. When our board chose Richard to be the chair, it elevated the wisdom we could bring to other matters. It moved well beyond Richard as an early childhood specialist.”

“Now what?”

In 2013, the achievement gap was narrowing, but foundation leaders knew they could do more. How could their School Readiness Initiative reach for a new level of impact?



At a gathering of the Resident Engagement Community Leadership Network, the team from The Community Foundation Serving Boulder County included, from left: Jane McConnell and Richard Garcia, Trustees; Josie Heath, President; Dee Andrews, community member; and Chris Barge, Director of the School Readiness Initiative.

That summer, the organization became one of eight community foundations from around the country to begin participating in the Resident Engagement Community Leadership Network, a year-long program that included eight community foundations and was coordinated by CFLeads, a national organization through which community foundations work together to advance community leadership practices. At the first network conference in Beverly, Massachusetts, Boulder’s team described how their project had convened forums of county school leaders, then Latino community leaders, to ask what more could be done.

The team then listened as colleagues from other foundations shared their experiences with resident engagement — an approach to making positive change that centers

on inviting community residents to help determine what needs to be done, then engaging them to play a key role in achieving those goals.

“As we came back from that first meeting and described what we had learned,” said Heath, “it was very clear that we had left out a big piece of resolving this. We had this ‘ah-ha!’ moment. The concept of resident engagement hadn’t been on our radar screen — and who *were* those residents? Of course, they were the Latino parents.”

Over the coming weeks, the foundation organized parent forums in three communities that have large Latino populations. Richard Garcia moderated. Each gathering drew about 60-80 people, to discuss how more parents

Overall, “We are seeing really strong gains among our Latino students,” observed John Creighton, a foundation Trustee who is the School Board President in St. Vrain School District, which has a large Latino population.

could be encouraged to support their children’s learning, and to be actively involved in school affairs.

It was also clear that the county’s close-knit Latino community can be skeptical of well-meaning outsiders. So at the next network gathering, in February 2014 in Sausalito, California, the foundation’s team asked how they might work through that resistance, to build productive relationships with individual families.

Said Garcia, “We came to Sausalito to ask, ‘Now what?’”

A brainstorming session sparked an idea: hire several people, drawn from within the Latino community, to be part-time parent outreach workers. If those folks were locally known and respected, they could reach out to parents and

Leadership: Networking for Diversity

“One of the roles you have to play in leadership is to be a talent scout,” noted Josie Heath, President of The Community Foundation Serving Boulder County. The foundation itself has become a talent scout — and talent developer — for new leaders who can help bring the diversity of the county’s population onto its nonprofit boards, public commissions and elected positions.

Leadership Fellows Boulder County is a foundation program, in collaboration with the Boulder Chamber of Commerce, through which self-identified emerging leaders commit to nearly a year of monthly half-day gatherings, where they talk with and learn from leaders of the county’s public, private and nonprofit sectors. In its fourth year, the program has almost 90 graduates. Half are from under-represented groups: people of color, the disabled and/or the LGBTQ community.

“This is not a training — it’s about building a network of transformational and inclusive leaders in Boulder County,” said Elvira Ramos, the foundation’s Director of Programs. Leadership Fellows represent Boulder County’s public, business, nonprofit and cultural sectors; each commits to serving within six months of graduation on a board of trustees, running for office, or otherwise taking on a leadership role. Presenters commit to being available afterward for conversation, advice and networking.

“My involvement with the Leadership Fellows made

me feel more connected to my community, and it empowered me to take more of a leadership role,” said graduate Eliberto Mendoza of Longmont, a child of Texas farmworkers who became Interim Director of Boulder County Community Action Programs.

The foundation’s project began when its research showed how few leadership positions across the county were held by people from under-represented populations. Twenty percent of graduated fellows have served on committees at the community foundation; one sits on the Board of Trustees. Others are on nonprofit boards and/or public boards or commissions. One graduate is a state representative.

“Another is now board chair of a large Boulder County nonprofit — the first time a Latina has held that position,” Ramos said.

The board of The Community Foundation Serving Boulder County now includes five people of color among its 22 total members. That closely reflects the proportion of people of color within the county’s overall population.

“What I like about the foundation is that they appreciate what you do in the community,” noted Richard Garcia, a longtime activist in Colorado’s Latino community who has chaired the foundation’s board. “They recruit members because of their community leadership and activism.”



Joining Colorado Lt. Gov. Joe Garcia, at right, in reading to a mother, her children and her neighbor's children is Richard Garcia, Trustee of The Community Foundation Serving Boulder County. Garcia is Executive Director of PASO (Providers Advancing School Outcomes), a nonprofit program that works with home-based providers of preschool care, primarily for Latino children, to help them give children a strong start in learning.

build on that initial trust.

Back in Boulder, Barge, McConnell and Garcia worked with community members in a process that led to the hiring of four well-qualified school readiness coordinators, each of whom is working in the community where she lives. “The key here will be to help parents of very young children really activate in their role as their children’s first teacher,” Barge explained.

“Another important aspect of the school coordinators’ work is building the leadership skills of young Latino parents to begin organizing their neighborhoods, in search of improved school outcomes for their kids. We’re calling this new program ELPASO – Engaged Latino Parents

“I believe we can only be a strong community foundation if we reflect our community,” Heath summed up. “The CFLeads process has pushed me to see how important this is in every aspect of what we do.”

Advancing School Outcomes.”

“I believe we can only be a strong community foundation if we reflect our community,” Heath summed up. “The CFLeads process has pushed me to see how important this is in every aspect of what we do. Are we being a part of all that we hope for our community?”

“What I’ve learned the most, and what we’ve all learned at the Community Foundation, is that it’s about listening,”

added Trustee McConnell. “We can’t come in and say, ‘This is what you need to do, to make sure your kids are graduating from high school.’ We need to listen to the community, find out what they need and what’s working for them — and then build on that.”



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Leading Change

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