

Communities of Opportunity

Draft Minutes: Interim Governance Group

May, 19 2017, 2:00 pm- 4:00 pm

Members Present: *Michael Brown, Betsy Jones, Sili Savusa, Adam Taylor*

Participating by phone: *Scarlett Aldebot-Green, Laura Hitchcock, Nadine Chan*

Staff Present: *Kirsten Wysen, Cheryl Markham, Alice Ito, Dan Bernard, Sharon Bogan, Aaron Robertson, Shirley Dickerson*

Guests: *John Hoyt and Denise Rhiner, Pyramid Communications*

Welcome – Michael welcomed members and guests to the Seattle Foundation.

Report from Oakland, CA: Community Agency & Health Symposium – A group of COO partners attended a symposium on community agency & health, sponsored by [Building Health & Community](#): Sili, Adam, Betsy, Michael, and Andréa A, were joined by Lisa Chen (FEEST/White Center) and Uche Okezie (HomeSight/Rainier Valley).

The organizers of the symposium are aiming to grow the [field of practice](#) that fosters the agency of communities as a way to improve health. The organization has an office in Seattle and an office in London. There was a mix of consultants, researchers, and community leaders interested in building energy and action around cross sector partnerships. The breakout sessions and panels, included case studies from Kern County (CA) and the Bronx (NYC). Our COO group was able to meet with other leaders from across the county and internationally (Haiti, Mexico, and England).

In conversations with other symposium participants, it was clear that COO was an exemplary model of fostering community agency (self-determination). As the COO contingent talked about the initiative, many other attendees were impressed by the co-design process, authentic engagement with communities and the progress we've made.

Overall, the information at the symposium was good. The questions posed were important to create a common understanding within the field of practice and investing in advocacy and building blocks. But, at the same time, our team felt like we may be farther ahead of the curve – operating at a more advanced level of engaging and supporting community-led efforts. It seemed that the symposium organizers may be able to learn from our experience.

Michael suggested that COO could create our own symposium. As part of our Learning Community we could plan to bring people together and invite J. Philip Thompson, one of the most dynamic speakers at the event. Thompson, who serves as a faculty member of MIT's Department of Urban Studies & Planning/ Community Innovator Lab, was one of the few people who addressed community agency with an explicit focus on race. There was interest in inviting Dr. Thompson to King County for an event that COO could host or co-sponsor.

The California Endowment & Building Healthy Communities

During the trip to Oakland, Michael, Betsy and Andréa visited directors of the Building Healthy Communities (BHC), an initiative that is very similar to COO but larger in scale. BHC is a 10 year and \$1 billion comprehensive community initiative launched by The California Endowment in 2010 to advance statewide policy, change the narrative, and transform 14 of California's communities most devastated by health inequities into places where all people have an opportunity to thrive.

BHC is in its sixth year, proving an opportunity to ask questions about some of the challenges BHC has encountered doing this work and what some of the lessons have been. We heard how they have successfully engaged with community; and how they have balanced the advocacy investment (since Private foundations really have limitations as far as advocate).

It was four years into the initiative when BHC discovered they needed to increase their communication efforts. They didn't have a robust explicit communications approach at the outset of their initiative. They have since hired a director of communications for their team, developed a communications strategy, and adopted a three-pronged approach that includes:

- (1) Capacity building of partners to tell their own stories (with digital and video storytelling, for example – which has been very popular and provided good community building opportunities);
- (2) Partnerships with media (for example public radio and television); and
- (3) Contracts with consultants to augment the work of their in-house staff.

Strategic Communications – *John Hoyt & Denise Rhiner, Pyramid Communications*

COO and the California Endowment understand that community change work is complex. It is long-term work. It's not easy to do and it's not easy to describe. COO's model is trying to sustain and spark capacity in our communities. In the process, we provide opportunity for our partners to be front and center. This can create some difficulty for people to quickly understand COO's approach. With these challenges, how does COO spark enthusiasm and how does the initiative gain support and increase investment in our work?

COO leadership realizes that it needs help to define a strategic communications approach. John Hoyt and Denise Rhiner of Pyramid Communications are working on a short term engagement project with COO to create a roadmap for a strategic communication approach that we hope will set the framework for a full communication plan. Betsy explained that the purpose for the discussion is for John and Denise to hear from IGG members about opportunities and barriers and share how we engage community leaders and residents. With feedback from the IGG, combined with their review of existing COO materials, Pyramid will develop recommendations for creating a strategic communications plan.

John and Denise shared their experience and approach for this project. IGG members asked questions about Pyramid's experience with equity-focused initiatives. IGG members gave feedback, noting that if Seattle Foundation and King County could use Pyramid's work to leverage additional philanthropic, public and private investments.

Meeting Adjourned at 4:00 p.m.