

Summary of Eva Foundation Third Annual Luncheon

On October 22, 2009, we had our third annual networking lunch for our past and current grantee organizations and other allied organizations at Farina Restaurant in San Francisco. Our goal with these events is to learn what the organizations are thinking about, and to get information to help focus our programs more closely. This year, we wanted to present our thinking about our collaboration program and see what everyone thought about it. As we usually do, we asked everyone a series of questions. Here is the summary of those comments:

Executive Summary

This year, we wanted to present our thinking about our collaboration program and see what everyone thought about it. Attendees overwhelmingly agreed that networking was worthwhile, and helped us understand the necessities to maintaining good collaborations, which includes not only having program goals in common but also shared values, dividing labor amongst partners equitably, and having their boards' support for these efforts. Many organizations noted that organizational development priorities could get addressed through collaboration, such as marketing and publicity, professional development, and board development, and similarly displayed many of their strengths in developing strong organizations that they could share with other agencies. In addition, there was much interest in learning more about each other's programs so they could increase access to services for their beneficiaries. It was suggested that our next events take the form of "brown bag" discussions where agencies and experts can share experiences around various organizational development issues.

Survey results indicate that people were most interested in working together on sharing relevant research and statistics, coordinating information about related programs and services, and publicity efforts. Because of this, we are working to list research and related resources on our website, have collated information about all of our programs and shared this with the organizations invited to the luncheon, created a social networking site for our organizations to continue communicating with each other (☺), and are beginning to identify press opportunities for our collaboration program organizations.

The Eva Foundation is honored to be able to have a role in facilitating cooperation and engagement amongst this extraordinarily dedicated and hardworking community! Some cooperative work has already started in the wake of the luncheon, and as we hear them we'll share these stories on the listserv.

Key Findings

The 2.5 hour luncheon was attended by 48 people representing 30 agencies (including EGF). In discussion at tables of eight, six questions were asked. Summarized here are the key points from the discussions stimulated by the questions.

1. Networking is important in order to do the following:

- a. Expand services provided to the agencies' beneficiaries through mutual awareness;
 - b. Share information to improve agency operations
 - c. Provide stimulation and support for agency personnel
2. Previous collaboration experience is decidedly mixed:
- a. Many agencies felt forced into problematic collaborations
 - i. A lot of work required for a diminished benefit
 - ii. Collaboration required between ill-fitting partners
 - iii. True costs of these efforts not well documented or well supported
 - iv. Priority and skillset of agency gets distracted by funder priorities
 - b. Successful collaborations include
 - i. Most important is shared values—shared program goals is not enough.
 - ii. Complete and enthusiastic support by each agency's Board
 - iii. Adequate (and fair) division of labor
 - iv. Developing enough trust to share sensitive internal information
3. Collaboration could address key, under-resourced organizational needs. Most organizations identified one or more of the below areas as weaknesses where, at a minimum, information from other agencies could help them become more secure.
- a. Marketing and Publicity
 - b. Professional Development
 - c. Board Development
 - d. Organizational Development
 - e. Cultural Acuity
4. Organizations have resources to offer each other. Some agencies are more developed than others in certain areas, and were willing to share information and experience.
- a. Media plan development
 - b. Diversity and cultural competency
 - c. Motivating individual fundraising
 - d. Leadership Development
 - e. Integrating external experience with internal, personal growth
5. Organizations want help from each other in order to improve service to their beneficiaries.
- a. They want their beneficiaries to participate in other agency's programs. (Eva Foundation Fellowships can support this).

- b. Sharing expertise around the areas listed above
 - c. Professional Development is a huge priority. The agencies are painfully aware of their weaknesses in this area and seek improvement.
 - d. A broad range of other issues were mentioned here as well (see extended notes for details)
6. What are the major advocacy areas that need to be addressed for girls?
- a. For girls as individuals
 - i. Body image, nutrition education
 - ii. Finding themselves; having time for self –reflection
 - iii. How to be in healthy relationships
 - iv. Emotional Intelligence training
 - v. Balancing personal power and vulnerability
 - b. For girls as a class
 - i. More free time due to shorter school day/year
 - ii. Absence of enough, and financially accessible, after school and summer programs
 - iii. Overpunishment in schools
 - iv. Violence and abuse—‘girl fighting’
 - v. Lack of media literacy
 - vi. The advent of technology and how it affects perception, learning and understanding
 - vii. Issues around juvenile justice

Discussion Notes

Is networking worthwhile? Generally, you all find networking to be valuable, although it’s much easier on a personal level than on an agency level. Its best when relationships form organically around shared values and visions. Everyone is looking to increase services to their beneficiaries; this is a key driver in the seeking out of partnerships. Some like supported collaborations, some feel that contacts are enough and the agencies can take it from there. Shared information is important—it can provide stimulus for new ideas. Face to face meetings are very important—much more can be communicated face to face rather than on paper or on the web.

What’s your experience with Collaboration? Many of you have had experience with funded collaboration efforts, and have definitely experienced them as a mixed bag, at best. While everyone sees the benefit of working together, many feel a pressure to collaborate—one agency had 24 hours to find a partner or risk the loss of a previously funded award. It can be difficult to hold on to your organization’s vision while feeling pushed to compromise in order to collaborate. Measuring the true cost of collaboration is a challenge—several of you felt you were underfunded relative to the amount of work it actually took. While it’s important to point out connections between organizations, values

must be shared to make the collaboration successful, not just program goals. Some collaborations feel as if you have to do the same amount of work for half the benefit of just working within your agency. Ideas can get used without proper recognition. The priorities and limitations of funders can impact the service delivery within each organization.

In addition to these issues, successful collaboration requires appropriate division of labor, and undivided board support in each agency. One funder present felt that adequate resources are very important to find success in collaborations; while most of you agreed with this, many agencies felt that shared values and real knowledge of each other is key to any successful collaboration. Both best practices and failures should be documented so mistakes can be avoided. Dealing with certain 'anxious' parts, like revealing funders or internal operating issues, require a lot of shared values and trust. Creating partnerships can enhance outreach.

What particular needs do you have that could be addressed through collaboration?

The group focused mostly on organizational development issues. One issue was volunteer recruitment; while consistency is important in maintaining support for girls, it's hard to do so. It's hard to find a volunteer base that mirrors their participants, but it's really important to have adult role models from the youths' communities, particularly adults of color, and from low-income backgrounds. Another big area is Marketing/ Publicity/ Communications-- strategic plans may advise agencies to focus more effort on communications, especially for publicizing their advocacy efforts, but the time to execute these efforts are hard. Board of Directors development/ recruitment is a key issue-- many of you wanted consulting around BOD development, specifically showing your BOD what they are supposed to do, i.e. fundraising, thought leadership, advising, site visits, etc. Finally, you sought advice around organizational decision-making, particular how to make decision-making processes fit organization culture in a healthy way.

(Ed note--From the Eva Foundation's perspective, many of you are good at some of these things—I hope our next lunch events can bring the questions and information/experience together at the same table.)

What do other programs need to know about your programs to better serve their girls? Answers to this question showed the individual strengths of each agency—there is expertise in many areas of need among the whole group. Overall, the need to develop a media plan again became identified as a key priority -- it's often seen as an add-on expense, but a shift in perspective is imperative to investing in communications. Several groups are working on their messaging today.

Strengths identified among the agencies include:

- An ability to engage in diversity and cultural competency work in their programs, as well as making sure that BOD is culturally competent/diverse, staff, volunteers, etc. (More than one agency is struggling with this issue as many are largely being run by white women.)

- Fundraising strengths include motivating people to give more, showing individuals how anybody can be a fundraiser; it's important to fundraise from intentionality and competency.
- Leadership development—many staff were people that came through the organizations' programs, and former staff have become leaders in other agencies. In CYWD's case, for example, being committed to a peer-led, young women of color run organization, every aspect of decision-making involves the women in their programs. Through this, they've been able to create opportunities for their young women to be in different spaces that affect their lives.
- Communicating the unique aspects of your pedagogy is important. Girl Ventures, for example, uses outdoor adventures to empower youth to develop their skills, and build their curriculum to reflect girls' issues/diversity. This is VERY unique in regards to the outdoor education world.
- Many agencies have built strong partnerships with schools, which is becoming an increasing demand from funders.

What do you need from other programs to better support your girls?

There were a range of specifics, such as CYWD wanting to connect with Girl Ventures so they could provide their girls outdoor programming; but several organizations wanted to take advantage of the other's programming to broaden the experience of their beneficiaries (*Ed. Note--Eva Foundation Fellowships can help contribute to this*).

Another theme was developing ways to share expertise, for example working with other organizations around media literacy and cultural competency, as well as sharing volunteers. How to keep in touch with alumni and continuing to keep their girls engaged was another challenge.

Professional development was a huge priority. More workforce development of people in the nonprofit sector, issues around staff retention and compensation, and simply the availability of competent people to fill available staff positions. Another deficiency noted was being able to take full advantage of what training there is available, for example how to create structure from trainings. For example, one participant had been to many fundraising trainings, but there wasn't usually someone there afterwards to help her develop a tailored fundraising plan.

Many other needs were mentioned. Nutrition education; media expertise; counseling and mental health services; general education around youth development issues; access to statistics for grant proposals current gang information; a girls slang dictionary; easier ways to discuss touchy issues such as sex, pregnancy, domestic violence, homelessness and prostitution; as well as a range of more specific topics.

What are the main advocacy issues for the girls' support sector? Comments here split into two segments—issues that impact individual girls and issue that impact girls as a class. (*Ed note: It was surprising to me that no one discussed advocacy for the agencies themselves as an issue. EGF hopes to be doing some of that.*)

Individual: Girls feel less in control of the future. Body image is a big issue as well as nutrition education. It's important to ground girls in finding themselves. Girls miss time to be within themselves—they need time for reflection. Once they've done this, then they can focus on their communities. Girls need education about how to be in healthy relationships, and for youth in general, the importance of valuing family/ relationships. Teaching Emotional Intelligence and social/emotional learning, or the issue of personal empowerment v. vulnerability, is another critical need.

Girls as a class: The ever-shorter school day/year is a problem contributing to a lack of structure in girls' lives. This is compounded by the lack of after school and summer programs, as well as these being financially inaccessible. Other issues included the following: overpunishment in the schools; violence and abuse in the home and community, specifically 'girl fighting'; lack of media literacy leaves girls open to absorbing negative stereotypes; technology and how it affects perception; and juvenile justice issues.

Are these gatherings helpful, and what should the Eva foundation do to help?

Everyone enjoyed the good food and good conversation; all wanted these opportunities to get together to continue. Some thought it would be great for funders to go to more of these so they could hear first hand what the agencies are thinking about. Several said we could cut back on the fancy lunch and provide more opportunities throughout the year for discussion and perhaps some peer based professional development. In general, the suggestion for EGF to be more involved in supporting professional development was a clear theme.

The Eva Foundation community can particularly benefit from working together. EGF should create a listserve to enable this group to be more in touch with each other. There was a strong interest in getting this group to work more together—the Eva group has been selected through the same lens, have a special synergy due to these shared values. Another general suggestion was to create a shared resource base.