

Public Talk

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Foundation Support of Community Development through Public Discourse

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American foundations play an enormous role in shaping national and international civic affairs, social, cultural and community life. Recognizing this, the Penn National Commission's 21st Century Community working group set for itself the task of assessing foundation activity in fostering strong civic communities and mending community fragmentation that divides people into antagonistic subcommunities based on race, ethnicity, religion, ideology, and other differences.

As the Commission's inquiries have become focused on issues of public discourse, we have become interested in the extent to which foundations are supporting the practice of public conversation to foster communities tolerant of diversity. In short, what are foundations doing to support discourse intended to assist communities whose members are "at loggerheads" with one another?

This inquiry is very much limited by the fact that we are looking into an area that does not neatly match existing data collection systems that normally help us understand the vast field of American philanthropy. In 1993, there were 37,571 foundations in the United States and their total assets were \$189 billion (Independent Sector, 1997 Nonprofit Almanac). The number of foundations has been steadily rising over the past two decades and the 1990s' strong stock market enabled foundations to give increasingly more grants. Giving USA 1998, a publication of the American Association of Fundraising Executives, reported a 7.5 percent increase in charitable giving overall in 1997. Foundation giving was reported as increasing "apace with asset growth" at the rate of 11.4 percent, reaching \$13.37 billion.

Organizations that regularly track philanthropy in the United States, most notably the Foundation Center, analyze foundation grantmaking activity according to hundreds of variables within larger categories such as education, health, social services, economic development, arts and culture, and religion. In none of these myriad classifications do the precise concerns of the Penn National Commission appear unambiguously. However, the Commission's interests in democratic participation, intergroup relations, conflict resolution,

and interfaith activity are clearly articulated in several categories that appear under the broad rubric of public/society benefit grantmaking, which includes subcategories for civil rights and social action, community improvement and development, philanthropy and voluntarism, and public affairs.

In 1996, public/society benefit grantmaking captured 11.6 percent of grant dollars and supported such enterprises as United Way, the Jewish Federation, and Catholic Appeal, which alone accounted for more than one-third of public/society benefit funds in 1996. Community improvement and development giving also represented more than one-third of all giving in the public/society benefit area; ten grants of at least \$2.5 million were awarded in this area for purposes including community development, economic development, and business services. Public affairs, including activities that promote effective government as well as public administration, leadership development, and public policy research comprised about one-sixth of public/society benefit support (or about 2.3 percent of total grant dollars), while the final subcategory—support for civil rights and social action—was the smallest giving area, equaling only 1.1 percent of total grant dollars. Grants in this area are typically much smaller than in the others and no grants of at least \$2.5 million were awarded in 1994-96 (Introduction to the Grants Index, Trends in Giving 1996).

The Penn National Commission's Community working group's interests are chiefly reflected in grants in the area of support for civil rights and social action, but even in this small giving area, awards in support of community building discourse programs are relatively few. In aggregate they comprise far less than even the 1% reported for civil rights and social action grants.

What follows is a snapshot of foundation activity in support of community building through public discourse. It is by no means exhaustive, but does represent a fair picture of the types and range of foundation interest in this area during 1996 and 1997.¹

¹ For this report a complete search of the *Chronicle of Philanthropy's* online archive for 1997 was conducted for keywords "civic participation," "intergroup relations," "conflict resolution," and "interfaith"; a partial manual search was conducted of the Foundation Center's 1998 *Foun-*

Foundation Grantmaking

At least sixty-three foundations made approximately 135 grants in 1996-97 that employed community discourse to improve civic life and reduce community fragmentation. Nine of these demonstrated a commitment strong enough to support three or more grants in this area. No grants were uncovered that sought to cross class or economic boundaries. Eighteen, or nearly 30 percent of these foundations, were among the nation's 100 largest foundations with assets in excess of \$360 million and ranging up to \$8 billion. The remainder were small family foundations, some corporate foundations, and a number of community foundations, particularly in California (where six were located), but also such geographically diverse locales as Palm Beach and Martin counties in Florida; Birmingham, Alabama; Dayton and Cleveland, Ohio; New Hampshire, Santa Fe, Houston, Pittsburgh, and Chicago. Foundations with a particular interest in Jewish causes were also notable in the selection. (For a complete list of foundations, please see Appendix A.)

These foundations evinced strong interests in education, improving intergroup and interfaith relations, conflict resolution, and the use of arts, the media, and occasionally history to support community dialogues. Grant ranged in size from several hundred thousand to those in the \$10,000 to \$20,000 range. No single award even approached the \$1 million level. Grants by those foundations that made three or more awards in the area of discourse-based community development programs are detailed below.

Fostering Positive Intergroup Relations Across Racial, Ethnic and Religious Boundaries in U.S. Communities

Foundations showed a great deal of interest in fostering good intergroup relations in American cities and towns across racial, ethnic, and religious lines.

dation Grants Index under keywords "Religion, interfaith issues," "Race/intergroup relations," "Public affairs/citizens participation," "community development/ citizen coalitions"; and the *1997 Foundation Grants Index* CD-ROM was researched under "Race/intergroup relations." These pre-existing keywords were the closest available matches to the Commission's interests.



This was not only a popular category for discourse-based programming, but for other types of foundation support such as the development of community centers; private intervention programs such as group counseling and mediation; and cooperative community and economic development projects. Many of these programs were small.

The California Community Foundation (CCF), for example, made grants of \$20,000 to KCRW Foundation (Santa Monica) for continued support of "Which Way LA," a public affairs radio program offering a forum for discussion of issues of public concern in the wake of the riots. CCF also gave \$25,000 to the Vaughn Family Center in San Fernando for a community-led intergroup relations program to improve communications and cooperation among the community's longstanding African-American residents and its rapidly growing Spanish-speaking population of Pacomima.

Another foundation very involved in intergroup relations is the Community Foundation for Palm Beach and Martin Counties in Florida, which gave \$10,000 to the Community Interfaith Coalition and Klein Dance to engage community religious leaders in a dialogue about beliefs and rituals. This last grant is also an example of the way in which arts programming is used to explore common ground on polarizing issues by providing through the arts a "neutral space" for discussion. The Levi Strauss Foundation, in California, made a \$50,000 grant to the Berkeley Repertory Theatre. This grant builds directly on the "neutral space" concept by funding not only the production, but also a post-show discussion series on Anna Deavere Smith's "Twilight Los Angeles." Arts were again used as a vehicle to explicate and alleviate community tensions through a play, "The Seventh Dream," based on the writings of students in the Flint, Michigan area who experienced violence. In this instance a grant of \$101,500 to Flint Cultural Center Corporation from the Charles Stewart Mott Foundation of Flint was used to produce a videotape for distribution to schools and social organizations and to link it with anti-violence projects with similar local and national programs. The play was also used to involve local teachers and students in exploring ways in which the arts can help resolve community problems.

San Francisco's James Irvine Foundation—along with the Ford Foundation—were the two leaders in funding the largest number of grants in public discourse and community building; each made at least a dozen awards in support of improving intergroup relations through public discourse. The Irvine Foundation was particularly interested in empowering local communities through human relations organizations and religious groups, making grants large and small: \$92,000 to the Western Justice Center Foundation to plan a California-wide blue-ribbon commission on intergroup relations in collaboration the California Association for Human Relations Organizations; \$32,000 to All Saints Church in Pasadena for the “Colors Project,” to work in conjunction with a group called Orange County Together to offer regional screenings and follow-up dialogues using the video, “A More Perfect Union,” which was part of the NEH's National Conversation on American Pluralism and Identity. The Irvine Foundation also made a substantial grant of \$200,000 to the California Association of Human Relations Organizations in San Jose to build and strengthen regional networks of California groups working to improve human relations and reduce intergroup conflict. Irvine made a smaller grant of \$10,000 to the San Francisco office of the same organization in support of a Summit on Human Relations and subsequent, issue-focused conferences. Irvine also granted \$175,000 to the Simon Wiesenthal Center's Museum of Tolerance in Los Angeles for the “Tools for Tolerance for Professionals” program and \$135,000 to the National Conference on Christians and Jews for a model diversity education program in San Diego's City Heights neighborhood.

As the other major funder in the field, the Ford Foundation was also focused on local communities, but often indirectly so. It made a grant of \$100,000 to the California Community Foundation in Los Angeles to be regranted to promote amicable intergroup relations among diverse ethnic and racial groups in that city. Similarly, to the Eugene and Agnes E. Meyer Foundation in Washington, D.C., it gave \$250,000 to establish a fund to improve intergroup relations in the metropolitan Washington area. Like Irvine in its grant to the Museum of Tolerance for its “Tools for Tolerance for Professionals” program, Ford also demonstrated interest in working adults with a \$50,000 grant to the National Multicultural Institute in Washington, D.C. to develop standards to improve intergroup relations in the workplace.

Other funders include the Charles Stewart Mott Foundation, which funded a total of seven grants in this overall survey; among them a grant to the University of Pennsylvania that speaks directly to the improvement of intergroup relations through public discourse: \$150,000 toward RACETALK Initiatives, a project to promote new strategies for thinking, talking, and collaborating about race and other important society issues. (This project is not affiliated with the Penn National Commission on Society, Culture and Community.)

The Rockefeller Foundation's involvement includes a number of grants concerned about mass communication and its role in promoting sound communities. It gave \$115,575 to the American Communications Foundation in Tiburon, California to produce radio segments focusing on areas of poverty, school reform, race, community building and environment for use by the Osgood File on CBS Radio and \$50,000 to Bay Area Institute toward planning for a cross-cultural communications project. It also supported the Field Museum of Natural History in Chicago's public learning program, "Living Together: Common Concerns, Different Responses" with a \$100,000 grant.

Fostering Intergroup Relations in Schools and Among Youth

Many of these same foundations gave specialized grants targeted to improving community relations among school-age populations. Again the community foundations in California and Florida were key funders: the California Community Foundation gave \$25,000 to Halcyon Center for Child Studies in Studio City toward first-year implementation of the PeaceBuilders program addressing racial tensions and conflicts at elementary schools in East San Fernando Valley. It also gave \$12,042 to the Youth News Service in Los Angeles for a special report on race relations among teens produced by the teen-aged staff of the news service. The Community Foundation for Palm Beach and Martin Counties in Florida made a grant of \$10,000 for Human Relations Camp, a cooperative effort between Palm Beach County Office of Equal Opportunity and School District of Palm Beach County seeking to promote interracial and intercultural understanding among elementary, middle, and high school students. The Ford Foundation made a multi-year commitment of \$383,000 to Rutgers University for a teacher-training program to integrate con-



flict resolution themes and practices into middle- and high-school history curricula. The Charles Stewart Mott Foundation gave \$40,000 to Rheedlen Foundation of New York for travel support for participants in the Harlem Peacemakers Project, a leadership-development program that trains youth in a range of violence-prevention and conflict-resolution techniques. The Mott Foundation also sponsored an educational research project, \$31,175 to the Leadership Conference Education Fund in Washington, D.C. for the Inter-group Relations Research Project to promote understanding and reduce prejudice among different racial groups.

Promoting Civic Involvement

Foundation efforts to increase citizen involvement in community affairs were also surveyed briefly to identify those that employ public discourse. Some of the very largest foundations—Carnegie Corporation of New York, the Ford Foundation and the Rockefeller Foundation—support programs in this area, as do community foundations, again exemplified by program support from the Community Foundation for Palm Beach and Martin Counties in Florida. The Carnegie Corporation awards in this area were centered on media coverage: \$100,000 to National Immigration Forum in Washington, D.C., toward balanced media coverage of immigration issues and a project to promote citizenship; and \$100,000 to the Tides Center in San Francisco toward a national media campaign, coordinated in Boston, on citizen participation in the 1996 elections.

Here the Ford Foundation's interests were centered in education: \$500,000 to the Texas Interfaith Education Fund to build support for school reform among varying constituencies; \$400,000 to University of Wisconsin at Madison for a documentary and public education to promote more-informed civic participation in government; and \$147,000 to Rutgers University to measure the effect of civic participation on the perceptions, attitudes, and behavior of high-school students. The Rockefeller Foundation gave \$50,000 to Harvard University's Center for International Affairs, toward a project entitled "Rebuilding America's Social Capital."

At the local community level, the Community Foundation for Palm Beach and Martin Counties granted \$18,500 for “Character Counts,” a project that encourages personal ethics and greater civic participation among residents of Martin County, Florida.

International Community Relations

A few foundations took an interest in international issues of community fragmentation, most often through conflict resolution and occasionally in a manner employing intergroup discourse. Many of the same principles that governed public discourse and civil society efforts in the United States pertained to international projects as well: a belief in the value of public discourse as a foundation for civil society; focus on small group settings involving specialized populations such as youth, scholars, and educators; and the use of the arts and media. What seems new are at least two (albeit small) grants that focus on women as a locus for community reintegration activity: to the National Peace Foundation in Washington, D.C., the Charles Stewart Mott Foundation made a grant of \$21,500 to expand a dialogue among women professionals and civic leaders in Armenia, Azerbaijan, and Georgia on conflict resolution techniques to be applied to wars in their Transcaucasus region. The Ford Foundation gave \$31,600 to Yayasan Kesejahteraan Fatayat in Indonesia for an interfaith seminar on religion, gender, and reproductive health.

More traditional community reintegration grants included one by the Mott Foundation of \$35,000 to the Foundation for a Civil Society (New York) for a series of conflict-resolution workshops to bring together Bosnians, Croats, and Serbs in four Bosnian communities to discuss such issues as the return of refugees, war-crime tribunals, and individual and collective responsibilities. The Mott Foundation assisted Parents, Teachers and Students for Social Responsibility in Moretown, Vermont with a grant of \$20,000 toward the creation of two community centers in Sarajevo and Banja Luka, Bosnia to provide training in conflict resolution and mediation, as well as community development activities among Croats, Muslims, and Serbs.

The Carnegie Corporation of New York focused on the role of scholarship and the media, giving \$50,000 to Harvard University for a workshop on post-

Soviet security for younger scholars and to study the effect of formal discussions on conflict resolution in the area. Carnegie also gave \$100,000 to Internews Network in Arcata, California for a project on the use of television to promote conflict resolution in the Caucasus region and \$50,000 to the Foundation for a Civil Society in New York for a project on conflict resolution in countries building civil and democratic societies.

Arts and the environment, the latter of which was not particularly important in terms of intergroup relations in the United States, were organizing themes for two Ford Foundation grants: one for \$49,500 to Leisure Center Podval in Russia for a theater program designed to teach intercultural conflict-resolution techniques to youth from global “hot spots” and \$150,000 to the Federal University of Rio de Janeiro for research and public forums on environmental management, governance, and civic participation in Brazil.

Analysis and Evaluation

The Carnegie Corporation of New York was the principal funder in this survey involved in research on intergroup discourse and community development. It granted \$156,000 to New York University for a study in suburban New Jersey on the effect on intergroup relations and student learning on the transition from elementary to middle school and the effect of academic tracking in middle schools; \$50,000 to University of Texas at Austin to analyze intergroup relations among students in Texas making the transition from primary to middle schools, and to assess the effects of middle-school reform on intergroup relations; \$144,000 to CUNY to study innovative approaches to intergroup relations at sites in Buffalo, New York; Montclair, New Jersey; and Philadelphia.

Foundations Supporting Civic Discourse Organizations

In addition to grants made in support of the discourse-based community programs described above, a number of foundations underwrite deliberative



democratic discourse activities designed to address broad national public issues or civic issues of a more local nature. Some of these are supported by operating foundations; others gather support from a variety of sources including foundations. A selection of those that have national scope are profiled below.

Kettering Foundation
200 Commons Road
Dayton, Ohio 454459-2799
937/434-7300
www.kettering.org

The Kettering Foundation sponsors National Issues Forums (NIF), which is a voluntary, nonpartisan organization established in 1982 based, according to their literature, on the tradition of the early American town meeting. "While most public meetings allow people to air grievances and debate pros and cons, such gatherings often become heated and highly polarized. NIF is rooted in the simple notion that people need to come together to deliberate about common problems in order to act on them." NIFs use prepared readings, a structured method of deliberation, and offer a number of "packaged programs" geared to specific issues as well as a methodology for developing specialized public conversations. They have been held in 6,000 localities under the sponsorship of local community organizations, state humanities councils, universities and colleges. Some programs are on-going from year to year, others have a limited lifespan. Some forums have a local focus, others a regional, state or national orientation. Some involve the general public; others involve special populations such as teachers and students. Training seminars for NIF moderators known as Public Policy Institutes and Issues Framing Workshops are held in a dozen localities nationwide every year.

Public Agenda Foundation
6 East 39th Street
New York, NY 10016-0112
Phone: 212/686-6610
www.publicagenda.org

Public Agenda is a nonpartisan, nonprofit public opinion research and citizen education organization founded in 1975 by Daniel Yankelovich and former Secretary of State Cyrus Vance. Its mission is to: "Help leaders better under-

stand the public's point of view on major policy issues [and] help citizens better understand critical policy issues so they can make their own more informed and thoughtful decisions." Its research is focused on public opinion and policy analysis for leaders and elected officials and its educational materials draw upon this research for the benefit of the general public. It offers an online issues information service for journalists, policymakers, and elected officials, and for the public produces the position papers and other discussion materials for Kettering's National Issues Forums. Its research and publications address such topics as school and health care reform, national security, AIDS, crime, economic competitiveness and the environment. Major funders include The Markle Foundation, William and Flora Hewlett Foundation, the Henry J. Kaiser Family Foundation, and the Annie E. Casey Foundation. Other foundation funders: Danforth, Ford, W. K. Kellogg, John S. and James L. Knight, John D. and Catherine T. MacArthur, Charles Stewart Mott and Rockefeller.

Study Circles Resource Center
697 Pomfret Street
P.O. Box 203
Pomfret, CT 06258
Phone: 860/928-2616
email: scrc@neca.com

The Study Circles Resource Center was established in 1990 and describes itself as a project of the Topsfield Foundation, a private nonprofit, nonpartisan foundation whose mission is to advance deliberative democracy and improve the quality of public life in the United States. SCRC operates by helping to establish large community-wide networks that serve as umbrellas for groups of study circles of ten to fifteen people who meet regularly over a period of weeks or months to address a "critical public issue in a democratic or collaborative way." In some cities, community-wide study circles involve as many as 800 to 1,500 people. Community-wide sponsors may be local newspapers, corporations, or large nonprofit organizations, which in turn create small study circles. SCRC also distributes educational materials and technical assistance to community groups. It consulted with the White House in the development of the public meetings for the President's Race Commission.



America Speaks

1711 Massachusetts Avenue, N.W., Suite 520

Washington, DC 20036

(202) 986-1017 (phone and fax)

amerspeaks@aol.com

www.americaspeaks.org

America Speaks is a project of the Pew Charitable Trusts, which describes its purpose as “linking citizen voices to national governance. A major challenge facing us as a self-governing people approaching the new millennium is to create and make workable effective mechanisms for ensuring that the actions of the elected office holders reflect the will of the citizens. We must strengthen our democracy by creating mechanisms that are accessible to the public and reflect the realities of the 21st century.” In the fall of 1995 the group sponsored a “Conference on Governance” in order to generate “shared learning from models, numerous scholars, and community leaders at the local level.” They next intend to develop an “electronic national citizens forum” by teleconferencing community leaders from eight to ten communities to “elicit and express their needs to national institutions.”

Americans Discuss Social Security

2001 Pennsylvania Avenue, NW Suite 825

Washington, DC 20006

Phone 202/855-9000

www.americansdisucss.org

Americans Discuss Social Security is another project of the Pew Charitable Trusts. It is a networking organization and clearinghouse for information on Social Security, which disseminates research data and a national calendar of events listing community and national forums on Social Security. It also circulates a booklet, contact information for reaching policy makers, and information on PBS broadcasts on Social Security and the December 8-9, 1998 “White House Conference on Social Security.” Through its website it encourages individuals to express their views on Social Security online. It describes its mission as “to engage Americans from all walks of life in a nationwide conversation about the future of Social Security so their views can influence policymakers as they shape its future. ADSS does not take a position of the issue of Social Security reform.”

Search for Common Ground
1601 Connecticut Avenue, NW, Suite 200
Washington, DC 2009
Phone: 202/265-4300
www.searchforcommonground.org

European Center for Common Ground
Avenue Louise 106, B-1050 Brussels
Belgium
Phone: 32-2.644.5731
www.searchforcommonground.org

Search for Common Ground/European Center for Common Ground are two nonprofit, nongovernmental organizations which work in partnership. Search for Common Ground was founded in 1982 in Washington, D.C. and the European Center for Common Ground was established in Brussels in 1995. In a common mission statement the organizations state that they “share a vision of transforming how the world deals with conflict—away from adversarial approaches toward comparative solutions. To implement this vision, we carry out programs that aim to resolve conflict and prevent violence.” Areas of focus include: Macedonia, Angola, Burundi, the Middle East, the Ukraine, and in the United States, the pro-and anti-abortion conflict. Working groups on civil society, security, the media, and conflict resolution operate within the organizations’ umbrella. Common Ground has developed a set of seventeen operational methods—which they call a toolbox—and which employ a variety of traditional mediation and facilitation techniques, as well as more innovative opportunities for intergroup discourse, including radio and television programming. Common Ground foundation funders include: Carnegie Corporation of New York, Ford, W. K. Kellogg, William and Flora Hewlett, Hauser, W. Alton Jones, Lippincott, John D. and Catherine T. MacArthur, McKnight, John Merck Fund, Charles Stewart Mott, Pew Charitable Trusts, Phillips Green, Ploughshares Fund, Public Welfare, Rockefeller Family and Associates, Rockefeller, Scherman Foundation, Tortuga Fund, Miriam & Ira D. Wallach, and the Winston Foundation for World Peace.

Benton Foundation
1634 Eye Street NW, 12th Floor
Washington DC 20006
Phone: 202/638-5771
www.benton.org

The Benton Foundation describes itself as working “to realize the social benefits made possible by the public interest use of communications. Bridging the worlds of philanthropy, public policy, and community action, Benton seeks to shape the emerging communications environment and to demonstrate the value of communications for solving social problems.” Its activities include demonstration projects, media production and publishing, research, conferences, and grantmaking. It is interested in probing “relationships between the public, corporate, and nonprofit sectors to address the critical questions for democracy in the information age.” It has projects to define the public interest in the information age by documenting effective new uses of technology, identifying activists and innovators, and equipping them with research information; online community organizing; a program to enhance children’s use of new technology; an “arts online” program sponsored in partnership with the National Endowment for the Arts; a multi-media issue advocacy program on campaign finance reform; and a collaborative program with Robert Wood Johnson Foundation using public radio stations in partnership with local organizations to develop health care solutions

Conclusion

American foundations are clearly playing an active role in supporting organizations and projects designed to foster good community discourse both in the United States and abroad. In the variety of activities supported, we find imaginative and practical approaches to community discourse among an astonishing array of community groups, social service organizations, museums, and educational institutions. Moreover, many of the good discourse practices cited by the Penn National Commission—respect for democratic processes, diversity of participants and points of view, reliance on evidence, use of traditional and alternative modes of expression (including the arts, historical, and

personal narratives), privileging of education and access to research and reliable information—all of these are values that characterize foundation-supported community discourse programs.

Many such discourse programs involve small group gatherings, whether of community residents, students and leaders, or educators and other professionals. At the same time there is wide recognition of the value of large public fora, radio, television, and the Internet, as useful vehicles for stimulating discussion and the exchange of information. The dissemination of information is important, with publications, research, conferences, research reports, videotapes, poll data and online information—some targeted at decision-makers and journalists—popular features among foundation-supported community discourse initiatives.

What seems most striking in this welter of activity is precisely its variety and the difficulty in tracking it. A few operating foundations such as Kettering, Benton, and Topsfield are clearly making substantial commitments in this area, as are the foundations that support the work of Public Agenda and Search for Common Ground/European Center for Common Ground. The Pew Charitable Trusts, with its special initiatives, stands out as a major funder.

Grantmaking activity is more difficult to assess. We know that the typical grant is not large, some are very small indeed. Grants of several hundred thousand dollars have been made by The Ford Foundation, James Irvine Foundation, Carnegie Corporation, Charles Stewart Mott, and Rockefeller, while Public Welfare, Levi Strauss, and some community foundations are also regularly making grants in the area. But with no foundation databases collecting and reporting data systematically, it is difficult to move beyond the anecdotal to draw conclusions and discern patterns of grantmaking.

For the foundations and their nonprofit partners, policy development and program evaluation under these circumstances is difficult at best. We know only that there is wide interest among a relatively small number of foundations that range from the largest to the smallest in scope and size. Precisely



how many dollars are being invested, and how effective these efforts are, remain questions for further research.