

Environment – Strategic Conversation Proceedings August 23, 2007

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This document summarizes key themes and discussion points shared during the Environment strategic conversation held as part of the Silicon Valley Community Foundation's Community Input Project. This was the third of nine strategic conversations convened by the community foundation as part of this project. A total of 60 participants attended the convening, representing environmentalists, community leaders, public agencies, donors and others actively engaged in and committed to the environmental movement in the region. In addition, various representatives of the community foundation's board of directors and leadership team attended this convening, including president and CEO, Emmett Carson. In addition, various representatives of the community foundation's board of directors and leadership team attended this convening, including CEO and President, Emmett Carson, Chief of Donor Engagement and Giving, Eleanor Clement Glass and Vice President, Community Initiatives, Convening and Research, Erica Wood.

Overview of the Community Input Project

Silicon Valley Community Foundation is committed to the best ideas and most effective solutions—at the local and the regional levels. With those goals in mind, the community foundation has initiated the Community Input Project, a series of strategic conversations, data review and community surveying around needs and issues that matter most. The issues were selected based on a review of local data, the many excellent assessments available about the health, social and environmental concerns in the region, and issues community members and leaders have raised.

The community foundation anticipates this process will spur a greater interest in regional partnerships as well as strategic solutions for meaningful, lasting and transformative change. The community foundation's board of directors will take the results into consideration when making decisions about future directions and strategies.

This project focuses on the following nine issue areas:

- Arts and Culture
- Children and Youth
- Civic Engagement
- Community Economic Development
- Education from K-16
- Environment
- Health
- Housing and Basic Needs
- Immigration

Structure of the Strategic Conversations

Each strategic conversation follows a similar model, designed to provide participants with a common context and framing for productive discussion. Community foundation staff opens the session with a welcome and overview, and then introduces a keynote speaker who delivers an inspirational presentation with the goal of creating a sense of energy and purpose for the group's conversations to follow.

Participants engage in direct conversation with each other and the community foundation through facilitated small-group discussions organized around the key issues identified in the issue briefs prepared in advance of the conversation. Issue briefs are available for download at www.siliconvalleycf.org. These small-group discussions are generative in nature, as participants respond to two key questions:

- What are the region's key issues in the area under examination for today's conversation?
- What are the most promising solutions and ripe opportunities for significant impact?

Participants reconvene as a large group following the small-group discussions to engage in integrative thinking. As a large group, participants share "big ideas" and strategies to impact the region's most critical issues.

All aspects of the conversations are recorded and synthesized for the community foundation to take under consideration.

Keynote Presentation and Subject Matter Experts

Carl Pope, executive director of the Sierra Club provided the keynote address for the environment conversation. In addition to his leadership role at the Sierra Club, he has served on the boards of the California League of Conservation Voters, Public Voice, National Clean Air Coalition, California Common Cause, Public Interest Economics, Inc., and Zero Population Growth. Mr. Pope was also executive director of the California League of Conservation Voters and the political director of Zero Population Growth.

Mr. Pope described three realities that underscore the need for new approaches to sustain the environment in the 21st century:

1. For the first time, more than half of the Bay Area population, about 3.7 million people, live in a place that has mastered rapid growth.
2. Current energy practices are no longer viable as we learn more about global warming and how human actions are impacting the climate.
3. The economy of the 20th century was based on resource depletion and degradation; this is no longer an option in the 21st century.

As a result, the environmental movement must consider and adopt new strategies including:

- Designing a marketplace that rewards and supports innovation in environmentally sustainable products and practices
- Aligning those who make decisions regarding energy capital equipment with those who pay for energy
- Increasing government responsibility and accountability for the effective and efficient use of sustainable energy resources

In addition to Mr. Pope, the following three subject matter experts were invited to provide additional context for the conversation and to serve as resources to the small group discussions:

- *Jeff Hobson*, as the policy director of the Transportation and Land Use Coalition, or TALC, leads the work of the Great Communities Collaborative, which brings together stakeholders to help Bay Area communities plan for walkable neighborhoods near mass transit.
- *Katie McCormack* is the multi-sector program officer at the Energy Foundation. For the last ten years, she has worked as an independent consultant with clients including the Energy Foundation and the Hewlett Foundation with whom she partnered on the Western Governors' Association clean energy initiative and coordinated the work of their energy and public lands grantees.
- *Sanjay Narayan* joined the Sierra Club as a staff attorney in 2002. Before coming to the Sierra Club, Sanjay worked for the Northern Rockies office of Earthjustice in Bozeman, Montana, and for Farella Braun Martel LLP in San Francisco.

Issues for Discussion: Pressing Needs and Opportunities for Impact

The three issues for discussion that participants engaged with in the environment conversation were:

1. Energy
2. Environmental Health
3. Land Use

The following summarizes the top-level themes from the small-group discussions on these topics.

Energy

Pressing Needs

- Lack of availability of success metrics
- Limited capacity to develop and utilize alternative energy sources

- Lack of coordination between regulatory forces and markets
- Lack of a broad-based educational platform to increase awareness, knowledge and opportunities for change
- Lack of a clear focus among philanthropists regarding how to approach this issue
- Lack of an efficient and easily accessible process to discard electronic waste
- Competing interests that complicate addressing energy-related issues
- Difficulty in engaging small- and medium-sized enterprises in energy-related solutions

Promising Solutions and Opportunities for Impact

- Expand incentives for green financing
- Capitalize on the region's interest and understanding of climate change
- Coordinate with social justice efforts to address systemic barriers
- Continue research and application of battery and electric energy, particularly for motor vehicles
- Develop report cards and information exchanges for the construction industry and other industries

Environmental Health

Pressing Needs

- Limited strategies to reduce utilization of household pollutants and pesticides
- Lack of coordination between environmental health and social justice issues
- Lack of information about how individuals can address the issue at the local level
- Lack of individual connection to the community and responsibility to preserve the health of the environment
- Lack of awareness of how the global economy has local environmental impact
- Lack of a systematic approach to using information for sustainable change in practices that impact environmental health

Promising Solutions and Opportunities for Impact

- Incorporate the importance of and strategies for conservation into the educational system
- Develop a grassroots campaign to communicate every-day strategies that individuals can implement in their homes and communities
- Link separate but related interests to create a broader awareness-building campaign
- Build upon and expand the San José Conservation Corps
- Link legislative efforts to regional action (i.e., Assembly Bill 32)
- Research and implement successful models (e.g., San Francisco, Sustainable San Mateo)

Land Use

Pressing Needs

- Need to expand the conversation to include rural and coastal issues
- Lack of available green and community space
- Lack of consideration of water storage in local planning efforts
- Lack of understanding of the relationship between urban sprawl and density
- Challenge in keeping public officials accountable
- Difficulty of balancing land conversation with transportation and housing needs

Promising Solutions and Opportunities for Impact

- Create more community gardens and other green spaces
- Build collaborative networks that are sustainable and action oriented
- Work to unite varied constituencies to develop a coordinated approach
- Provide public officials with information and strategies to support environmental issues
- Engage more actively in advocacy and policy efforts at the local, regional and state levels

Participants' Overarching Suggestions

Building on the ideas and discussions generated during the facilitated small group rotations, participants shared their overarching suggestions that are at the intersection of critical issues, ripe opportunities and potential for meaningful impact. The following provides a summary overview of these suggestions. Please note that there may be overlap with ideas generated in the small-group discussions previously summarized and some ideas may have been subsumed or categorized with others to reduce redundancies. It is also important to bear in mind that these overarching suggestions are not only for Silicon Valley Community Foundation's consideration, but also for all those who are interested in and support the environment sector in the region.

Summary of Overarching Suggestions

- Create/support markets for innovative approaches and incentives for adoption through policy changes
- Create benchmarks of success to promote proactive rather than reactive approaches to environmental issues
- Educate youth through community work projects on conservation and habitat restoration
- Promote regional governance and collaboration
- Establish guiding principles and questions that address issues of sustainability, social justice and environmental justice; before funding any projects, product, business or institution
- Support community-based collaborative planning efforts at the neighborhood, city and regional levels
- Engage in land-use policy change across jurisdictions in the region
- Create more environmental education opportunities for youth and families
- Coordinate business, regulatory and environmental groups to ensure efficient pursuit of the adoption of supply side (emerging technologies) and demand side management solutions to

effect rapid change, combat regulatory impediments and market barriers, and share best practices

Next Steps

Silicon Valley Community Foundation staff is reviewing and analyzing content from all nine strategic conversations, alongside results from a community survey and comprehensive review of local studies, to provide recommendations for the board of directors to consider in determining future community impact work. These recommendations will encompass the variety of ways in which the community foundation can achieve impact, including grantmaking, initiatives, convening, research, donor engagement and policy/advocacy efforts.

For more information or to download the issue brief for the conversation, please visit our website at www.siliconvalleycf.org. You can also email questions, comments or suggestions to Charu Seth, administrative assistant at cseth@siliconvalleycf.org.