

Technology for Social Good - Community Conversation Proceedings Summary

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Palo Alto, California

Background

This document summarizes key themes and discussion points shared during the Technology for Social Good community conversation as part of Silicon Valley Community Foundation's Grantmaking Review process. This is the sixth community conversations convened by the community foundation as part of this project. A total of 41 community participants attended the convening, including representatives from private sector technology corporations, philanthropic community members and nonprofit organizations. In addition, various representatives of SVCF's leadership team attended the community conversation, including CEO and President, Emmett Carson, Chief Community Impact Officer, Erica Wood, and Manuel Santamaria, Vice President, Strategic Initiatives and Grantmaking.

OVERVIEW OF GRANTMAKING REVIEW PROCESS

The grantmaking strategic review process is intended to be both a look back at what SVCF has achieved with its grantmaking investments since 2008, as well as a look forward to assess and understand where there are emerging opportunities for SVCF to make a positive difference for our community through grantmaking. The review process will provide SVCF's staff and board of directors with the information necessary to determine whether to stay the course with our grantmaking, make adjustments or direct our investments to new strategic areas of concern. Decisions based on this review process will be announced in October 2017.

STRUCTURE OF COMMUNITY CONVERSATIONS

Each community conversation follows a similar model, designed to provide participants with a common context and framing for productive discussion. SVCF's CEO and President, Emmett Carson,

and Vice President of Strategic Initiatives and Grantmaking, Manuel Santamaría, opened the conversation with a welcome, provided an overview of SVCF’s accomplishments related to technology for social good and introduced the three critical questions participants were being asked to discuss:

- What are the most ripe and promising opportunities for using technology to advance the common good, including creating access to resources and information among the region’s most vulnerable communities?
- What are the barriers that get in the way of using technology to advance the common good (particularly among the region’s most vulnerable communities)?
- How can we best engage the technology sector to identify and invest in opportunities to develop effective and accessible technology solutions that advance the common good (particularly among the region’s most vulnerable communities)?

Shiree Teng of the consulting team, Teng & Smith, Inc., provided instructions on the expectations and group agreements for breakout circles. Participants were invited to self-select one group to engage in direct conversations with each other through facilitated small-group discussions and rotate after a 40-minute discussion to provide the opportunity to answer two of the three questions.

SVCF staff was present in the breakout circles as either notetakers/scribes or listeners only. After small group discussions were over, participants reconvened as a large group where SVCF staff provided information about next steps in the grantmaking review process and reminded participants to check www.siliconvallecf.org/svcfgrants for more information. All aspects of the conversations were recorded by notetakers and then synthesized for the community foundation to take under consideration.

COMMUNITY CONVERSATION THEMES

Participants welcomed the opportunity to share and connect with each other. Teng and Smith, Inc. transcribed participants’ post-it notes, as well as the notetakers’/scribes’ own observations and reflections, providing for a rich and detailed summation of each question.

Given the wealth of information gathered, SVCF decided to organize the data to be most faithful to participants’ ideas, which are presented in the following pages. However, the most common themes on how SVCF can use its influence in the sector were:

- *Research and Resource.* Gather from grantees their understanding of what is needed to increase their capacity to adopt/adapt technology. Move this agenda by leveraging resources to meet these needs.
- *Connect.* Create pathways to plug in and connect tech talent and resources to social sector/nonprofits.
- *Values.* Be a platform to incorporate a social equity analysis for innovation in the private tech sector. Lift up best practices.
- *Build technology capacity in the nonprofit sector and vulnerable communities.* Expertise, people, hardware, software, information.
- *Incubate innovation.* Create a hub for cross sector innovation. Broker relationships and connections to foster innovation.
- *Create a marketplace for technological innovation for good.* Help tech sector with a frame for ROI for using tech for social good.
- *Foster understanding.* Help the technology sector to understand the need in their communities, to understand impact they can have, and their responsibilities as corporate citizens. *“If you have a local presence you should have local presence.”* Raise the value of social sector issues and skills in the private sector tech world.
- *Rally resources.* Continue to work with tech companies to grow and direct their philanthropic efforts. Use a vertical integration approach, cultivating employee giving as well as corporate giving. Find and cultivate corporate champions in the tech sector.
- *Connect and Align.* Help to better align tech sector needs and nonprofit needs, through intermediaries/go-betweens, that help to shine a light on possible connections to educate and bring awareness in both the private and social sector, through platforms that connect a range of resources.

Conversation Summaries

The group discussions identified further pressing needs and opportunities for greater impact in our region. The following section summarizes discussion for each critical question in an overview of the conversation and reflections on the role of SVCF to influence the use of technology for social good in Silicon Valley.

Please note that the detailed notes for each conversation are available in a separate appendix. They are actual comments and feedback from the participants from this community conversation and may not reflect the opinions or future plans of the community foundation.

QUESTION ONE

What are the most ripe and promising opportunities for using technology to advance the common good, including creating access to resources and information among the region's most vulnerable communities?

(Four break-out circles, total of 31 participants)

Overview of Conversation:

Key themes gathered from scribe summaries

- *An emerging frame for core values.* Participants put forward some ideas that were threads throughout the discussion that could serve as core values or principles: privacy, trust, enhanced user experience were widely agreed upon as an envelope for new endeavors. These were not strategies or issue areas per se but a frame to hold strategies as they emerge, the how rather than the what.
- *Using technology to address social inequality.* There was broad agreement around the important role for innovation in solving social problems, as participants asked, "What can disruptive technology mean in relation to social inequality?" How can tech be used to address basic needs? They agreed also about the importance of equity in access to technology. Participants raised the idea of incorporating an equity lens into technological innovation, "Private sector tech should incorporate analysis of do no harm; based on values. Think about unintended consequences – who is left out/harmed." Ground innovation in the ways that leverage how users use technology now, for example, the prevalence and ease of texting. Engage with user expertise/perspective in designing new interfaces/technologies. Explore how young people or digital natives can drive innovation.
- *Bridge and connect.* Use social networking technology to bridge and connect, to match people with skills in the social sector with opportunities, and vice versa, to match those with tech skills to organizations and issues that can benefit from these. Use social media to create more value around social sector skills.
- *Connect services with people and improve access to social infrastructure.* Use technology to assess the needs for safety net services such as shelter beds, for example, to coordinate timely response to needs as they arise and change, and across jurisdictions. Use technology to more easily match people with needed resources and information. More broadly, use portals to connect and link users to services and benefits, as a one-stop shop. Enhanced real time responsiveness to crisis and emergency. In health care, use technology for remote diagnoses, monitoring, data collection, low-cost triage.

- *Information access.* Participants discussed access to information: in terms of improving access to archives of information, such as libraries and records; in terms of “pushing” relevant information via text to target populations; and as a platform where people can get questions answered. There was special mention of using technology to help people discern real information from “alternative fact” information, and helping people understand actual implications of this information for their lives.
- *Identify and address gaps to broaden basic access.* Participants highlight the need to increase access to basic broadband and communication technologies. “For basic needs, if you want to apply for a job, you can only go online. That creates a gap.” “Like TOMS, if you buy a phone then someone else gets a phone.” Leverage tech infrastructure to increase access to broadband: “Microsoft has TV whitespace that can be used by re-allocation of that spectrum. There are so many places where there are still those lines, Fremont has that, I wonder if these old TV/Telephone lines can be re-allocated for broadband access. Spectrum re-allocation.” Participants also highlight linguistic access, urging partnerships with tech and telecom companies for their language platforms, language and culturally sensitive texting approaches, and integrating language access when making services available online and mobile friendly.
- *Build tech capacity in the social sector.* Match private sector talent with needs in the social sector, cultivating volunteerism among tech workers. Build capacity of nonprofits to adopt/adapt technology. Foster coordination between tech and nonprofit sector. Repurpose and share platforms to support nonprofit sector activities.
- *Civic engagement.* Connect people to information. Connect people to actions. Connect communities to public processes. Help people be more connected to government using technology.
- *Organizing, democracy and communications for advocacy.* Use technology, especially social media to cultivate empathy, to amplify community voices, to tell stories and to empower social movements.
- *Data.* Participants see potential in using data, aided by technology, for more effective evaluation and to coordinate regional efforts across jurisdictional lines. They want to “go to the source,” to draw data directly from communities to inform the governmental decisions that impact them, to foster inter-jurisdictional data sharing – “mapping the problem” by discipline or focus area, e.g., housing, and to use data to predict trends to deploy resources in a more targeted way.
- *Education and training.* Participants’ ideas about technology for education and training were widespread. They saw technology being used to support remote education, to support low cost or free education and to generally enrich education. Participants noted a need to invest in future tech

workers by “providing rich, coherent and ongoing STEM education opportunities to all students.” They highlighted a need for training in tech tools to connect to tech jobs. There is a focus on young people.

- *Transportation.* Expand the reach of ride sharing technology; repurpose it for low-income communities. Integrate technology further into transportation infrastructure; use predictive technology for improving existing transportation systems.
- *For philanthropy.* Keep an ear to the grantee network to learn what support grantees need to build their tech capacity in support of their work and to further engagement. Keep keen eyes for opportunities to foster innovation, and for likely hosts/hubs for innovation and partnerships.

Reflections on the Role for SVCF

- Gather from grantees their understanding of what is needed to increase their capacity to adopt/adapt technology. Move this agenda by leveraging resources to meet these needs.
- Create pathways to plug in and connect tech talent and resources to social sector/nonprofits.
- Conversely, raise value of social sector issues and skills in the private sector tech world.
- Create a hub for cross sector innovation to occur, broker partnerships.
- Be a platform to incorporate a social equity analysis for innovation in the private tech sector. Lift up best practices.

QUESTION TWO

What are the barriers that get in the way of using technology to advance the common good (particularly among the region’s most vulnerable communities)?

(Two breakout circles; total of 19 participants)

Overview of Conversation

Key themes gathered from scribe summaries

- *Entrepreneurial risk is not the culture. Little appetite for risk.* The culture of community serving organizations may be at odds with risk-taking or more entrepreneurial approaches to leveraging technology for the common good. As one participant put it, *“the incentive structure (to leverage technology) in the social sector differs from the private sector. The social sector is responding to multi-sided market forces versus the private or corporate sector which is centered on clients and users AND searches for solutions at scale for profit driven market development.”*

“Most tech companies are designing to solve a problem; not related to the needs of communities. Communities have largely been ‘consumers of and not creators of tech.’ That is a real barrier.” “Nonprofits and community do not understand how tech is built and works.” In addition, tech companies are not advocating for things that address basic human necessities. “Nonprofits need to evolve and adopt technology use to be a model for the people they serve.”

Participants offered examples of culture and functional distinctions between sectors. Government agencies still use traditional RFPs that exclude innovation or tech as part of the work. The public sector’s infrastructure has not been adjusted to technology for common good. In government agencies, evidence-based strategy requirements hinder the pace of innovation and tech. And in the public sector, fascination with one-time solutions or ‘quick wins’ gets in the way of better long-term strategies like re-working tech into core services indefinitely.

An important factor deserving consideration in this discussion is capacity. Perhaps nonprofits and public agencies have not had the luxury of time and resources to carve out for big picture thinking or planning to leverage technology for the common good.

- *Importance of human connection and user-centered design.* Participants noted the importance of human connection in designing technology for the common good, especially for vulnerable groups including seniors, the poor, the homeless, English language learners or the physically disabled. “Build legacy software systems with relevancy and feedback from users in vulnerable communities.” “Build software and make sure people can use it.” In addition, “technology cannot replace trained people providing legal or social services.” As powerful as technology is, people are still the essential factor in delivering public services. To improve tech design for the common good, participants agreed greater communication and engagement of end users are vital.
- *Insufficient resources.* Lack of funding for innovation and insufficient capacity to build tech infrastructures have been barriers for nonprofits and public serving agencies. In many cases, nonprofits are unable or unwilling to pay market rate to compete for employees. Nonprofits and low-income, disenfranchised communities often lack the resources to cover costs of technology development and use. The public sector often falls short of resources to compete with private sector capacity to advance commerce and advertising. There is also the notion of “technical debt” in government and nonprofits. For example, “a tech firm says we can help you reach more people through an app or other software but the public sector can’t deliver the needed information because it is still collected manually or on excel sheets, etc.”

- *Access.* Vulnerable communities may lack access to the internet, technology platforms and hardware. Participants noted language access as a persistent area where technology falls short. Device and broadband access is another example. At times, public sector and nonprofit developments in the use of cutting edge technology isolate people who can't access it on their own. Technical standards and online downloading formats came to mind for participants. Depending on the demographic, there may be limited understanding among the public of what kinds of technology and updates are accessible to them through nonprofits and public agencies. Inequitable access to hardware in schools remains a barrier evident in public and private schools where, "one class may have two laptops for the entire class and another class may have devices allocated for each student."
- *Tech sector bias, non-inclusive design.* Participants suggest a lack of diversity among those creating tech tools is a barrier. When tech designers and providers are predominantly white males, there is a chance the needs of vulnerable communities will be overlooked in tech planning and design phases. Vulnerable communities are then left out of the "big picture." Some software has built-in biases that harm communities. One participant expressed that "there is a perception and myth that tech commerce and social good are synonymous just through technology advancing communications and transparency of information, but tech is not solving problems in local communities or improving outcomes for youth."
- *Digital literacy and fear barriers to tech adoption.* Technology is rapid, ever-changing, and can seem strange and overwhelming to the average user. Participants highlight that user mindsets and fears are barriers to fully embracing and adopting technology. At times there is a general lack of digital literacy among vulnerable communities. The fear of the abstract unknown leads to sentiments like "it is not for me." Some groups fear technology would make them more vulnerable to predatory abuse. Parental fears about what children might be opening or getting exposed to online are valid but may lead to avoidance of the internet altogether, hindering them from fully embracing technology and using it as a leverage for social good. To remedy these and similar issues, participants recommended encouraging groups to "listen and experiment." "It is time for nonprofit professionals to both adopt new tech and learn about opportunities."
- *Eco system. Ways to adopt and use technology to advance the common good.* Vulnerable communities and the institutions that serve them need improved methods for discovering what technology they can leverage. "Demand side of government doesn't know how to buy it and the supply side doesn't know its needs." Participants highlighted the importance of understanding what digital literacy means in order to make an impact. "Identify the basic needs

for your nonprofit so everyone to be on same page; leveling the playing field.” Keep data current. Lead by example. Take risk, share what works, and learn from others.

Reflections for SVCF

- Stop reinventing the wheel. Look deeper into nuances and hidden gaps of technology use among vulnerable communities and work at those. “Philanthropy tends to operate locally and on a smaller scale but tech thinks systematically about its massive reach.” Is there a way for philanthropy to scale who it serves or its reach to better compete and align with technological advances?
- Coach organizations in reducing risk-aversion and adapting to different ways of approaching and implementing tech for social good. Discourage nonprofits and public agencies from ‘quick win’ and one-time, Band-Aid solutions to implement tech for good. Instead support long-term, sustainable efforts to maintain practical tech standards.
- Support efforts to reduce tech sector bias and non-inclusive design. Help community serving organizations become consumers and creators of tech for common good through efforts such as tech diversity recruitment initiatives at universities and companies.
- Partner with tech and private sectors to be the bridge between the tech sector and community serving organizations in order to broaden and include communities in the user design process.
- Don’t ignore organizational capacity as factor hindering vulnerable community serving organizations from keeping up with tech advances. Reduce “technical debt” by supporting organizations and agencies in their efforts to keep up with the private sector; using versions of similar software and data collection platforms compatible with current, mainstream tech offerings.

QUESTION THREE

How can we best engage the technology sector to identify and invest in opportunities to develop effective and accessible technology solutions that advance the common good (particularly among the region’s most vulnerable communities)?

(Four breakout circles; total of 23 participants)

Overview of Conversation

Key themes gathered from scribe documents

- *Engagement spectrum.* One group of participants organized their discussion around the idea of an engagement spectrum, different levels of engagement between the tech sector and communities,

including the social and nonprofit sector. This ranged from tech firms donating some portion of its profits to communities/social sector, to employee volunteer programs, to ideas about structuring partnerships for innovation, to more fundamental interventions in education resulting in building a pipeline of tech talent that is diverse and representative. This might be a useful tool for thinking about engaging the technology sector to identify and invest in ways to advance the common good.

- *Build an on-ramp for tech participation.* Build a bridge between the tech sector and the social sector. Begin by assessing needs and building relationships/alliances in both sectors. Create spaces/platforms to exchange and connect ideas and information. Participants especially called out the need to understand incentives for tech participation, and to communicate a return on investment for tech companies - ranging from financial return, to corporate responsibility, to brand marketing. Explore ways to ensure profitability, including government investment/subsidy. Educate private sector tech firms about the needs of the nonprofit sector, how the nonprofit sector operates, the issues their communities face, and the important role the private sector stands to play. Support clearly defined metric-centered asks of tech resources.
- *Cross sector partnerships.* Participants shared some ideas about how partnerships between tech and nonprofits could look and function: include tech from the beginning of ideation, to help to build partnership from the ground up; look to existing public/private tech partnerships and existing tech nonprofits such as Code for America, Black Girls Code, Inveneo, and FHI 360; define a sphere of impact that is fundamental, day-to-day rather than extraordinary, make this alluring; nonprofits should take a proactive role as partners, in articulating needs and providing guidelines to tech partners and also in testing usability of solutions designed.
- *Match and connect tech resources with nonprofit sector.* Overall participants see a need to better align tech sector's needs with nonprofit sector's needs, highlighting a disconnect between what is offered by tech and what is needed, or what there is capacity for, at the nonprofit level. "There needs to be an intermediary that can connect the dots and 'match' the needs with the opportunity." Participants see opportunities to connect nonprofits and vulnerable communities with resources from tech such as expertise, space, products and software/hardware. They see potential to facilitate broader volunteerism, connecting tech talent with the social sector. Finally, they see the opportunity to expand and normalize corporate and employee giving.
- *Engage tech sector to build capacity of nonprofit sector.* Work with nonprofits to expand knowledge of/access to relevant technologies that will improve their work. Create intermediaries between tech and nonprofits. Build technical talent within nonprofits, increase training, leveraging expertise of tech community.

- *Engage technology sector in education and training.* They see a need to increase dialogue between schools, research and the tech sector to better grasp how to incorporate technology into education at every level. They highlight the need for education that prepares young people, especially from vulnerable communities to participate the workforce using a curriculum that puts reading and collaborative STEM design at its center. Participants see a need for the technology sector to connect with people - to involve them in solutions, to hear their perspectives - and education and training is an opportunity to do this. Participants believe technology is an important part of educating and training people for participation in the future.
- *Collaborate around social solutions.* Focus on developing solutions for big issues, like housing, transportation. Generate mechanisms to support innovation for greater good: connect with incubation hubs and accelerators, create a marketplace for innovation for good. Convene partners, disruptors, hackers to collaborate and innovate. Build understanding of users, their needs and how they use. "Bridge the divide between technology developers/innovators and users on the ground." Encourage and incentivize collaboration across tech companies.
- *Engage tech sector to mobilize for change.* Use social media to amplify voices for change. "What is the thing that gives voice and bridges the gap between vulnerable communities and young communities that actually do care? Technology is a part of the play of the larger community organizing." Leverage and cultivate technology sector employees as stakeholders for activism /volunteerism.
- *Adapt existing all access technologies.* Use far-reaching technologies, i.e., social media, mobile, that already are built to leverage universal access to serve social good. "If the mantra is mobile – how do we bring mobile access to all kinds of things? Mobile access to benefits, information, etc. How can we ensure there is "no wrong door" for the community? Can tech provide the expertise in this design?" Integrate these with information.

Reflections on the Role for SVCF

- Use the community foundation's unique positioning and vantage point to assess and gather information, creating a unified voice or platform for what is needed by nonprofits from the private technology sector.
- Build tech capacity. Expertise, people, hardware, software – in nonprofit sector.
- Create a marketplace for technological innovation for good. Broker relationships and connections to foster innovation. Use an SVCF "seal of approval," a set of metrics that a tech provider has met a specific standard to adapt to a sector. Help tech sector with a frame for ROI for using tech for social good.

- Help the technology sector to understand the need in their communities, to understand impact they can have and their responsibilities as corporate citizens. “If you have a local presence you should have local presence.”
- Continue to work with tech companies to grow and direct their philanthropic efforts. Use a vertical integration approach, cultivating employee giving as well as corporate giving.
- Find and cultivate corporate champions in the tech sector.
- Help to better align tech sector need and nonprofit needs through intermediaries/go-betweens that help to shine a light on possible connections to educate and bring awareness in both the private and social sector, through platforms that connect a range of resources.