

Impact Story

Maximizing Community Benefits

Central Corridor Funders Collaborative and Learning Network—Twin Cities

A few years ago, the Metropolitan Council of the Twin Cities announced plans for a light-rail transit line to connect the Minneapolis and St. Paul downtowns. On the surface, the 11-mile Central Corridor line is an ideal smart growth investment. It has the potential to reduce traffic congestion, improve air quality, make neighborhoods more walkable, and create jobs and economic development for the neighborhoods along the line. Yet, it also has the potential to exacerbate gentrification, or, depending on the placement of stations, do little to improve access to public transportation for low-income residents.

In 2007, recognizing both the promise and the potential perils of the Central Corridor project, the Funders' Network helped funders in the Twin Cities create the Central Corridor Funders Collaborative and Learning Network, a partnership of 11 funders that are working to maximize community benefits. For the start-up phase, Anne McEnany, a former Funders' Network consultant, functioned as the Collaborative's de facto staff person, working with members to initiate their work together, connect them with outside resources, and support the hiring process for a full-time staff person. When the Collaborative hired a permanent coordinator, McEnany moved into a more conventional consulting role.

"Funders' Network members, particularly The McKnight Foundation, The Saint Paul Foundation, and the John S. and James L. Knight Foundation, were the driving force and inspiration for the members of the collaborative," says Jonathan Sage-Martinson, the Collaborative's new coordinator. "The conversation started around the fact that this is a huge change for our

communities, but we didn't know that we had the information we needed to get ahead of the curve. The Funders' Network provided the staffing and the organizational glue to help our members think through what they wanted to do."

In its consulting role, the Funders' Network was able to share insights from similar work elsewhere around the country and to connect the members with other funders. "Anne has been key in helping provide continuity as we have gone through the transition with me coming on staff and ramping up activity," Sage-Martinson says. "She's been working before, during, and after my hiring, and has helped provide continuity and outside wisdom."

The project is scheduled to break ground in 2010, but Collaborative members have already started laying the groundwork to ensure that the planning and execution of the project is inclusive and beneficial to all members of the community. Collaborative members have raised a \$5 million Catalyst Fund, which will identify and fill gaps in existing efforts and catalyze new initiatives to more effectively develop stable, healthy, walkable, and diverse neighborhoods near the Central Corridor.

With the combination of a strong learning agenda and seed money to support new ideas, the Collaborative is poised to become a model for inclusive, equitable transit-oriented development planning. Says Sage-Martinson, "Our goal is to help other actors in the corridor have access to good information so they can make good decisions."