



Global Warming, Climate Change and Smarter Growth

Note: at the March 2007 annual conference of the Funders' Network in Baltimore, the Board of Directors of the Funders' Network agreed to adopt and distribute broadly a "sense of urgency" statement about global warming/climate change and the opportunity to apply smarter land use and intelligent transportation solutions to that challenge. This statement reflects that commitment, and describes what the Funders' Network for Smart Growth and Livable Communities, in collaboration with others, intends to do to encourage philanthropic leadership in global warming solutions.

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The Need

There is no doubt now that global warming and climate change are a predictable future, the terrible and worst consequences of which can only be averted through intelligent, persistent, concerted actions by all nations and all sectors of all societies. As stated by the Pew Center on Global Climate Change:

“The scientific community has reached a strong consensus regarding the science of global climate change. The world is undoubtedly warming. This warming is largely the result of emissions of carbon dioxide and other greenhouse gases from human activities including industrial processes, fossil fuel combustion, and changes in land use, such as deforestation.... This warming will have real consequences for the United States and the world, for with that warming will also come additional sea-level rise that will gradually inundate coastal areas, changes in precipitation patterns, increased risk of droughts and floods, threats to biodiversity, and a number of potential challenges for public health.”

Philanthropy must bear its share of the responsibility to solve this problem.

The Opportunity

In the United States, as elsewhere, the projected impacts of global warming and climate change have very significant implications for our current and future patterns of development, mobility, and land conservation, issues that are of primary interest to the smart growth field and many members of the Funders' Network (TFN). This is particularly true for coastal areas that will suffer the consequences of sea level rise and intense hurricanes. But all other areas—urban and rural alike—will suffer from drought, reduced water supplies from snowmelt, and changing ecological systems.

Current development patterns, especially low-density sprawl, which lengthens commutes, reduces greenspace, and requires higher energy consumption, will exacerbate greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions. Conversely, and importantly, the kinds of development and conservation patterns promoted by the movement for smarter growth can help reverse these trends and actually lead to reduced carbon emissions and increased carbon sequestration.

In fact the strategies promoted by organizations and funders committed to smarter growth represent a virtual symphony of climate change solutions: revitalization of urban areas and small towns; transit-centered and compact development; affordable and accessible transit; affordable housing development in existing neighborhoods and communities; and diminished metropolitan and rural sprawl. All of these strategies reduce vehicle miles traveled (VMTs) and thereby reduce vehicular carbon emissions, adding to the benefits gained from alternative fuels, improved vehicle operations, and other emission-reducing technologies. “Green” buildings, neighborhoods, communities, and regions reduce energy use and therefore reduce energy (fossil fuel)-driven carbon emissions. Protection of working farmlands, particularly those that serve local food systems; sustainable management of working forests; and conservation of open space and natural resource lands—these all retain considerable ability to prevent carbon from entering the atmosphere. Global warming/climate change solutions fall clearly into the already well-established “triple bottom line” results of smarter growth planning and investment (positive economic, environmental, and social equity outcomes).

Though the U.S. population continues to grow (to 400 million by 2043), sustainable patterns of development and conservation can accommodate that growth, improve the quality of life and broadly shared economic prosperity of our communities, advance environmental justice and fairness, AND prevent the worst consequences of global warming and climate change.

Our nation’s Governors and Mayors are at the forefront of efforts to address climate change. Motivated by local impacts and opportunities, they also recognize the unique role that states and local governments have in making land use, economic development, and transportation decisions. We note that California has taken a leading role in the global warming arena through adoption of AB 32—the nation’s most ambitious, statutory commitment to reducing greenhouse gas emissions. Therefore, there will be specific, concrete, and replicable opportunities to promote smarter growth strategies throughout the state, as a vital component of the overall effort to address global warming. There will be special opportunities for California philanthropy to help make this link apparent to policymakers and to promote smarter growth decisions ubiquitously as a climate action strategy.

Community Foundations and Private Philanthropy

Though the solution to global warming and climate change requires action at all levels—international, national, statewide, and regional/local—there is a special responsibility to prevent and mitigate the effects of global warming at the regional and local level. First, all effects and strategic solutions, particularly those involving land use and transportation, will have special regional and local characteristics, and must be tailored to fit those characteristics. Second, if the common effort to fight global warming is to be sustained and supported—in public policy, in economic and business decisions, and by individuals and households—it will require engagement of people in their very own communities, from all

segments of society and from “the bottom up.” Finally, many lower-income communities impacted by climate change will need resources to ensure that environmental justice is a central component of mitigation efforts.

These issues all present special opportunities for leadership and grantmaking among our nation’s community foundations and locally-focused private foundations—which make up the vast majority of TFN members. As an example of such leadership, The San Diego Foundation has created the “Climate Smart” program, through which it will raise awareness and catalyze regional action—through research, convening, policy advocacy, collaborative grantmaking, and donor engagement. (To learn more see http://www.sdfoundation.org/communityimpact/environment/cs_about.html).

Again, because California is a national leader in state and local action on climate solutions, the Funders’ Network will work with the leadership of California’s community foundations and private funders to encourage their active leadership in climate solutions.

For national private foundations, supporting innovative land use and transportation policies at the federal, state, and local level is vital as our nation moves into the implementation phase of state climate action plans that are being adopted across the country and translated into binding regulations like AB 32. At the federal level, support from national foundations is essential to ensure that there are robust advocacy efforts during key windows of opportunity to influence national transportation and land use policy debates. These debates will be crucial battlegrounds for either winning policies that can reduce GHG emissions or lock-in the business-as-usual patterns that will prevent us from meeting our goals. At the state and local level, national foundations are encouraged to join with local philanthropic partners, who represent a source of grantmaking intelligence that will make the best use of scarce resources and help ensure the success of efforts to create broad civic engagement and support to ensure that political commitments are carried out.

The Funders’ Network Commitment

The Funders’ Network intends to work with the Climate and Energy Funders Group and other partners to promote and support philanthropic leadership in the smarter growth-climate change arena through a series of strategic activities:

- Developing a “case statement” and other communications materials and tools for funders—to promote all aspects of smarter growth as a climate solution. This will be supported by the preparation of a snapshot of the field to help funders understand the actors, initiatives, and landscape of what is going on in the “climate” world.
- Helping collect empirical evidence to make the case that “smarter land use and intelligent transportation decisions” represent a powerful set of strategies for addressing global warming.
- Conducting partnership forums with others in philanthropy and the smarter growth and climate change fields to broaden funder engagement.
- Preparing menus of options for funders interested in working at the nexus of climate change and smarter growth, including community foundations and a broad range of other funders.

- Promoting funder-funder and funder-practitioner collaborations to magnify the impact and improve the effectiveness of philanthropic support.

What Your Foundation Can Do

The Funders' Network encourages all foundations to learn more about what they can do to address global warming and climate change, through their existing community leadership and/or grantmaking programs, or through new programs developed for this purpose. The needs and opportunities, whether functional or fields of interest, are as diverse as philanthropy itself. If you work in the field of the aging or youth, health or the arts, local grantmaking or national/international, there is a way that you can join in this effort. Whether you make core support grants, or support research or convening or the media or civic engagement or policy advocacy, there is a strategy that can help. The Funders' Network is committed to helping enable its members, and partnering with others in philanthropy and with leading smarter growth organizations, to solve this crisis.

Please join us in this vital work. For further information, please contact Ben Starrett (ben@fundersnetwork.org), TFN Executive Director; or Nick Bollman (nick@fundersnetwork.org), TFN Senior Fellow.