

A Community Foundation in the Bronx:
A path towards transforming local communities and improving lives

Nurah W. Amat'ullah
Bronx, New York, United States
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A Community Foundation in the Bronx: A Path Towards Transforming Local Communities and Improving Lives

This position paper examines the timeliness of forming a Bronx community philanthropy organization that will be a catalyst for significantly transforming the lives of Bronxites. The working definition of community foundations used in this discussion is

independent, public charities that steward philanthropic resources from institutional and individual donors to community-based organizations. Community foundations strengthen communities by enabling people to create charitable funds that address a wide range of interests. Through visionary, diverse, and inclusive philanthropy, community foundations have become catalysts for significant community change.¹

This paper reviews various models of community foundations and community philanthropy to determine the feasibility of a type of homegrown giving that is founded on heightened hometown pride and is leveraged to transform first the dominant social narrative (which says that those who are socio-economically successful are leaving the community) and later the community. The research for this paper helped the author conceptualize an appropriate framework for establishing a community foundation or community foundation-like entity in the Bronx, more specifically the South Bronx, New York.

Using the PetroBronx collective as a case study², this paper focuses on how a community foundation can be an alternate mechanism for transforming the community when a previously established funding agency and process involving community resources and community participation failed to bring about lasting change. In the ever-changing landscape of what constitutes the community (or communities) in the Bronx a question has emerged: How do you build institutions that allow for the inclusion of new-comers?

The leadership of the PetroBronx collective consists of member organizations that vary in their levels of commitment to working with all silos of community members. The aim of this paper is to provide the leadership group with a path towards the cultivation of human, economic and cultural assets in the South Bronx—a community that is synonymous with urban decay. The challenge is determining the format of a community foundation-like structure that best affords the maximum opportunity for community members and organizations in the Bronx to serve locally in ways that are accountable, responsive and beneficial to Bronxites.

Included in this paper are reflections and evaluative thinking on the funding opportunity that lead to the formation of PetroBronx and the types of funding opportunities that result in, or lead to, the development of community philanthropic structures in general. In addition, the author looks at how funding opportunities or foundational launch assets determine the mission, structure and strength of the resulting philanthropic enterprise.

¹ Council on Foundations, “Community Foundation Fact Sheet”; see <http://www.cof.org/templates/41.cfm?ItemNumber=16889&navItemNumber=15626>.

² PetroBronx is a collective of community-based organizations that are located primarily in the South Bronx. The collective was born out of a single funding opportunity.

Introduction

In a webinar with the 2010 Senior International Fellows, Diana Miller and Heather Scott of the Council on Foundations shared that community foundations are as unique as the communities that they support and where they are located. However, a common thread that sews these entities together is the provision of a central location where key community stakeholders can identify and respond to a community need for the benefit of all, with each stakeholder bringing to the circle required elements including

- a relationship with those impacted by the matter to be addressed
- intimate knowledge of the community
- capital/money
- relationships with local and state legislative decision-makers in matters requiring permits and other legal permissions.

The last element requires regular review and special handling. The Council on Foundations, which counts community foundations as 31 percent of its membership, views these entities as four-legged stools, the legs of which are fund development, investment management, grant making, and community leadership cultivation.

William S. White, president of the Charles Stewart Mott Foundation, writes:

We have witnessed repeatedly the flexibility and creativity of community foundations and community-based philanthropy not only to channel financial resources to local charities, but also to establish partnerships, foster collaborations, nurture vitality and build endowment—all to benefit communities for the long-term.³

This statement accurately captures the desired outcome that a collective of diverse community organizations concentrated in the South Bronx has for its beloved community. This collective is the subject of the case study presented in this paper. However the desired outcome is neither a communal nor shared mission stated by the collective or the funder. When asked about what they desire for the community, each organization passionately states its goal as a divine secret mission of community salvation that can only be carried out by that organization specifically.

Another thread connecting these organizations is that they all received grants through the Bronx Social Justice Fund (BSJF) a unique funding opportunity in which the majority shareholder in a multinational corporation recently instructed its philanthropic office to disburse one million dollars in grants annually over three years to organizations headquartered in the Bronx. Initially hosted by the office staff of a locally-elected federal official, there was a two-year period of strategy development with community organizations to design the criteria by which funding was to be determined. The elected official was instrumental in getting the attention of the funder,

³ Dorothy Reynolds, *The Balancing Act*, [vol. I], *The Role of a Community Foundation as a Grantmaker* (Flint, Michigan: Charles Stewart Mott Foundation, August 2008), inside cover.

and convincing it to focus on the Bronx. A revolutionary convening (which was really an uprising) resulted in the elimination of direct input from the elected official's office staff and the relocation of meetings from the official's district office to rotating locations in the community. Thereafter the collective spiraled downward.

The collective determined a grantmaking process and placed a cap on the grant amount. In the first year, the collective provided a total of \$730,000 from \$1 million in funding to eight organizations and returned \$270,000 (the balance) to the funder. Many funders and recipients alike would consider this a travesty, especially in an area with the economic woes of the South Bronx. Lacking in vision, the collective returned over a quarter million dollars to the funder because the collective's member organizations were unwilling to include organizations beyond their circle to potentially benefit from this opportunity. A lack of structure in the collective also strongly contributed to its poor decision making. Other collectives consisting of community organizations or community philanthropic entities that formed in response to the challenge and opportunity of managing a single-donor gift to be disbursed as grants to members of the collective—ie. collectives that are both the grantee *and* the grantor—have not been identified. Hence PetroBronx had no road map to follow. There were and continue to be many challenges in developing an efficient system to structure the functions of the collective.

Dorothy Reynolds, an expert on community foundations, offers guidance in this area. She recommends that community foundations be viewed as mechanisms for local philanthropy; instruments for leadership development; and an avenue along which necessary matters of advocacy, service delivery and policy that impact the community can be driven.⁴ The PetroBronx collective could have been better guided and greatly strengthened had it been armed with this information when the collective was launched.

Historical Background

The South Bronx area is comprised of five community districts in the southwestern portion of the borough (also the county) of the Bronx in New York City. Its total population in 2000 stood at 522,412, approximately 40 percent of the population of the Bronx. Of this population, 39 percent is Black and 60 percent is Hispanic. This represents a higher percentage of Blacks and people of Hispanic descent than resides in all of Bronx County, New York City, or New York State. The percentages of the population that are Black and Hispanic are above Federal guidelines that define minority populations for the purposes of identifying environmental justice issues associated with federal actions. Additionally, the percentage of the population that lived below the poverty level in 1989 was 39 percent. This is over 10 percent higher than the portion of the population whose income is below the 1989 poverty level in Bronx County as a whole, almost 20 percent higher than those in New York City and about three times those in New York State and the United States. The South Bronx growth rate between 1990 and 2000 of 11.8 percent is slightly higher than that of Bronx county (10.7 percent) and New York City (9.4 percent) and double that of New York State (5.5 percent).

⁴ Reynolds, *The Balancing Act*, [vol. I], *The Role of a Community Foundation as a Grantmaker*, 3.

Population sectors within the South Bronx have changed in size over the past decade in different ways between 1990 and 2000: the Black population has declined by 3.5 percent while the Hispanic population has increased dramatically by 18.8 percent.⁵ According to a published analysis of US Census Bureau data, a number of other notable population changes occurred in the South Bronx during a fifteen-year period.⁶ Among all Latinos, the percentage of Puerto Ricans in the South Bronx fell from 76 percent in 1990 to 53 percent in 2005. Dominicans increased from 11 to 22 percent and the Mexican population rose from 4 to 12 percent. Approximately 10 percent of Latinos owned their own homes or apartments in 2005. Median family income increased from \$12,300 in 1990 to \$19,150 in 2005, while median household income rose from \$14,740 to \$21,290. About 5 percent of South Bronx Latinos over 25 years of age had earned a BA degree or higher in 2005. Among Dominicans, the rate was 12 percent, compared with 3 percent for Puerto Ricans.

Many who work in the human and community service sectors in the South Bronx anxiously await the rollout of community demographics data in spring 2011, which will comprise the results of the 2010 US Census. They hope that the data will reflect our experiences as workers in these sectors with the new populations in the South Bronx. Counted among these new populations are groups displaced by gentrification in Harlem and Washington Heights/Inwood, and new immigrants joining family networks originating from West Africa, Southeast Asia, South and Central America and the Caribbean.

In the Bronx, the exponential increase in the number of Community Development Corporations (CDCs) parallels the revitalization efforts that followed “the burning Bronx” era of the late 1970s and early 1980s. The CDCs are non-profit property development and management corporations that secured large tax incentives to rehabilitate burnt-out housing stock and offer affordable, yet shrinking numbers of low-income housing units. Most CDCs in the Bronx did not partner with other service-providing community-based organizations to offer the safety net and quality of life services members of the community need. Instead the CDCs created and operated their own service programs, with the advantage of having cost-free office space (often the main overhead expense in operating a program) in which to do programming.

Most CDCs come to the table with high dollar value ‘brick and mortar’ assets. Having high dollar value assets in their financial records allows for the entities’ costs to operate human service programs to be underbudgeted. Of the approximately nine CDCs operating in the South Bronx, six are members of the New York City office of the Local Initiative Support Corporation (LISC).

LISC New York City raises grants, loans and equity for strategic investments in community development organizations. We commit to working with community groups over a long period of time, providing them with consultation and training

⁵ <http://quickfacts.census.gov/qfd/states/36/36005.html>.

⁶ Astrid S. Rodríguez “Demographic, Economic, and Social Transformations in the South Bronx: Changes in the NYC Community Districts Comprising Mott Haven, Port Morris, Melrose, Longwood, and Hunts Point, 1990–2005”, 3,-5, 10; see <http://web.gc.cuny.edu/lastudies/latinodataprojectreports/Demographic,%20Economic,%20and%20Social%20Transformations%20in%20the%20South%20Bronx.pdf>.

in addition to financial support to help these organizations – and the residents they serve – prosper as they improve their communities. LISC New York City also facilitates strategic partnerships between public and private stakeholders that provide additional financial resources and leadership to community groups assisting low- and moderate-income families in New York City.⁷

This outreach by the CDCs to grow their resources does not have a comparable inreach to empower local residents. The agenda of the national LISC has attained varying levels of success nationally. However, it is not implemented locally by the South Bronx CDCs.

Several years ago, a broader vision of community development came together in an ambitious new strategic plan for LISC, to create what we are calling Sustainable Communities. These are places that offer the positive environments needed to ensure that all residents of varied income levels are provided the opportunities and tools to build assets, to participate in their communities, and to become part of the mainstream economy. They are, in effect, the embodiment of both "community" and "development" — places where human opportunity and social and economic vitality combine with a continuous process of growth, adaptation, and improvement. For almost 30 years LISC has been in operation, we have seen huge, positive changes in neighborhoods throughout the country. Communities once characterized by blight and hopelessness now reflect widespread physical improvements, safer streets, increased property values and more engaged residents. But as neighborhoods have changed and the business of community development has evolved, so too has LISC's role. In addition to stimulating change, we must now ensure that neighborhoods which have climbed back from disinvestment and abandonment can sustain and build upon those gains. To that end, LISC's focus has turned to the next phase of building healthy communities: creating opportunities for residents of those communities to raise their incomes, build assets and gain access to quality education, health care, jobs, services and recreational amenities.⁸

The nine CDCs that are headquartered in and serve the South Bronx are either at varying levels of functioning or viability in the area of service delivery or are staying on mission. This is true for their core mission of managing housing stock and community development, and the opportunistic work they have taken on in the areas of human and social service.

Community Development Corporations run the risk of becoming undercapitalized, unstable and unable to follow through on any sustainable plan of community development.⁹

⁷Local Initiative Support Corporation-New York City "About Us;" see http://www.lisc.org/new_york/about_us/index.shtml.

⁸Local Initiative Support Corporation-New York City "Community Development Corporations;" see http://www.lisc.org/new_york/partners/corporations_1206.shtml.

⁹Jeffrey S. Lowe, "Community Foundations: What Do They Offer Community Development." *Journal of Urban Affairs* 26, no. 3 (2004):221-240.

In a case study on community foundations, Jeffrey S. Lowe argues that because community foundations maintain a high level of accountability, accessibility and responsiveness to community need, they are poised to play a comparatively greater role as partners in the capacity, activities and successes of CDCs. Yet, CDCs have a history of making advances at the expense of other organizations working in the same local communities. In many areas of urban decay in the United States the CDC is the premier organization engaged in development and often emerges as an elite-tier organization and a black hole for resources coming into the community it claims to serve. Unfortunately, this aspect can spell death for many independent non-profit organizations in the catchment area of a CDC. At the unrecognized expense of these organizations, CDCs are often viewed as gate-keepers by other service organizations operating in the same area.

The history of localized philanthropy in the Bronx is undocumented. As the poster image of urban decay in the United States, the southernmost sections of the Bronx have received much money over the past thirty-five years, without real or sustained community input. An Internet search for community philanthropy in the Bronx yielded the following sole result on Wikipedia's web site:

The Center for Bronx Non-Profits (CBNP) is the convener of community and faith-based organizations serving the Bronx. CBNP works to strengthen organizations and the borough as a whole through professional development seminars, networking, coalition building, and educational courses. It includes the We Are The Bronx Fellowship, the Bronx Forum, the Non-Profit Certificate Program at Hostos Community College, and the Bronx Community Coalition. The Center for Bronx Non-Profits is funded by the J.P. Morgan Chase Foundation and is managed by Hostos Community College and CAUSE-NY, the intergroup relations division of the Jewish Community Relations Council of NY (JCRC-NY), in cooperation with the Bronx Borough President's Office.¹⁰

Community Philanthropy: Required Parts

In the quest for a model that will meet the goals of a community philanthropy entity in the Bronx, consideration will be given to the potential difficulties that any collective of community organizations may encounter as it works to develop internal structures and tools for administering all aspects of a community foundation-like enterprise, including the administration of funds.

The tools for conducting the business of the philanthropic entity must include measures for transparency, in an effort to recover from breaches of trust and networking fatigue that are triggered by competition over shrinking resources in the local non-profit sector. The rebuilding of trust among the stakeholders/community members must be intentional and factored into the process of conducting business from the beginning.

¹⁰ "Center for Bronx Non-Profits;" see http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Center_for_Bronx_Non-Profits. It should be noted that this is a self-generated advertisement as indicated by the web site.

The procedural and administrative models that are cultivated must include strategies that encourage community development in which community members, through the organizations that they build, understand, observe and experience the functions and roles that these organizations play in community development. Community development should include processes for integrating the power of, first, individuals, and next, the community, into the decision-making process. The guiding question is what type of “buy-in” is required, from all community members, to maintain control of the resources coming into their communities and being used to develop what they, as a “collective” and integral “representatives of the community” determine is needed.

A main goal of community philanthropy will be the implementation of models combining the necessity for the community foundation-like entity to develop the structures and processes required to administer grant funds. Another goal is multi-tasking to build its internal capacity by making technical assistance available to grantees. Fund-raising strategies and resource cultivation will also be necessary. A study of current regulations, on all levels, that govern this type of community-directed philanthropy will also be necessary.

The motto for traditional foundations has been “For good. For ever.” Community foundations have forced the inclusion of a third factor: “for all (us).” Another factor introduced is the understanding that “success” requires the three Rs—relevant, responsive, and reflective—in order to live up to the mission of “For good. For ever. For all (us).” Any emerging community philanthropy structure is challenged to incorporate the three Rs into its institutional culture. The institution must be 1) relevant to the community it intends to serve and/or support; 2) responsive to needs articulated by the community; and 3) reflective of its constituents in its human imaging.

In a seminar with a group of Senior International Fellows at the Center on Philanthropy and Civil Society, Nicholas S. Deychakiwsky¹¹, a program officer at Charles Stewart Mott Foundation, challenged the class to formulate a contemporary mission for community foundations and community foundation-like entities, building on the existing historical mantra of “For good. For ever.” The Mott Foundation describes its focus on community philanthropy in the United States as follows:

Goal: To support a strong enabling environment for philanthropy and the nonprofit sector in the U.S., emphasizing accountability, effectiveness and inclusiveness.

Objectives/What We Seek:

- Nonprofit Sector Effectiveness and Accountability. Access by philanthropic and other nonprofit-sector practitioners to learning opportunities, capacity-building assistance and policy advocacy that enhance their organizations’ effectiveness and accountability.

¹¹ From discussion with Nicholas S. Deychakiwsky, Program Officer, Charles Stewart Mott Foundation, during a seminar titled “The Mott Foundation, Community Foundation Roles, and Global Philanthropy,” October 28, 2010.

- Racial/Ethnic Diversity in Philanthropy. More inclusive practices within philanthropy so people of racially and ethnically diverse backgrounds increasingly impact decision making and participate as leaders within the field.
- Nonprofit Sector Research. Timely and reliable generation and dissemination of data and research on philanthropy and the nonprofit sector for the benefit of the field.¹²

The Fellows rose to the challenge Deychakiwsky put before them. Together the group of Fellows offered a third component “for all (us).” This component has the capacity and potential to globalize the concepts of community-focused and/or community-based philanthropy in ways that move the sector from a feudalistic model of the owner (often male and by bequest) being charitable to the peasant/worker, to models where everyone gives and that which is given is valued and acknowledged.

As the Fellows contemplated mechanisms for harnessing the momentum and ‘now-ness’ of social entrepreneurship to the inclusive goodwill of community philanthropy—which will not replicate social stratification and create another elite realm (class)—the concept of re-imagining community was offered by this author.

The concept of re-imagining community is elastic enough to include and invite full civic participation; embrace population transitions and include the cultural traditions of community members; and cultivate a community philanthropy model that is reflective of all community members at any given point in time.

Case Study

The Bronx Social Justice Fund (BSJF) was launched upon the instruction of the majority shareholders of a multinational corporation headquartered in the U.S. This group of stock holders told the corporation’s philanthropy office to allocate \$3 million of their investment to the South Bronx over a period of three years (\$1 million annually) beginning with the 2007-8 fiscal year.

The BSJF presented two unique opportunities. First, the BSJF had the potential to launch and develop an initiative in the Bronx that mirrors the solidarity of the “people to people movement,” a central pillar of the Bolivarian Alternatives for the Americas (ALBA). ALBA is a Latin American initiative based on solidarity and justice. ALBA is also based on multi-level cooperation among nations in Latin America and among peoples throughout the region, and it offers a platform for building consensus. The consensus built seeks to create spaces and mechanisms to evaluate, cultivate and share agreements among populations and countries that promote indigenous development at the national, regional and local levels. The institutions built through the ALBA framework maintain as key objectives the elimination of poverty, correcting social inequalities and securing a better quality of life for all. Second, the BSJF was a unique opportunity for community groups to be at the center of developing, creating and implementing

¹²Charles Stewart Mott Foundation, “Programs at a Glance;” see <http://mott.org/about/programs/civilsociety/programsataglance.aspx>

visions of community transformation based on the principles of community solidarity, collaboration and empowerment at the local level, while also having international ramifications. The fund was a working testament to the mantra “think globally, act locally.”

For the first time, communities of the South Bronx through the organizations that serve them determined how significant resources coming into the community were to be distributed. A group of community organizations were tasked with using their experience and knowledge to develop formal working collaborations among themselves. It was recognized that the organizations generally knew firsthand the needs of the South Bronx.

The entity that was responsible for making grants from the BSJF was named PetroBronx , a collective of South Bronx-based organizations, organizers, activists, and individuals with diverse and rich experiences in community work. PetroBronx was created with the vision to operate within the framework of ALBA. The collective aimed to organize and implement a grassroots effort for community improvement and transformation of the lives of South Bronx residents, while creating bridges between the South Bronx and other ALBA territories. The member organizations of the collective committed to providing support for social justice, education and cooperative building, as well as environmental conservation projects appropriate for the local urban environment. Another goal of the collective was the implementation of an initiative for self-sufficiency and social development.

Over a three-year period of growth and learning, many organizations within the collective and their participants put a lot of energy and time into developing and creating the PetroBronx network. The collective grew larger and more diverse and the number of grantees increased from eight in year one to thirty-three in year three. In the first year the organizations requesting funding formed an evaluation committee to review grant proposals submitted to BSJF. At the end of that year the members of the PetroBronx network, in consultation with the multi-national corporation’s philanthropic office, decided to invite a third party to administer the allocated funds and provide technical assistance to develop the collective and the organizations requesting funding.

The funding cycle came to an end. The collective continues to struggle with its identity and vision and many of the organizational members are facing imminent demise. Nevertheless important lessons can be learned from the work of PetroBronx, and there is great potential for moving forward with a local community-based foundation in the Bronx.

Observations and Lessons Learned:

While the BSJF represented an opportunity for community-directed growth in the South Bronx, key opportunities were missed. Prior to the formal establishment of PetroBronx, community organizations received no instructions on how to build formal working collaborations. In particular the multinational corporation’s philanthropic office failed to implement an educational component for both the BSJF and/or the community organizations. Such training could have helped both parties clarify intentions and communicate desired outcomes

From day one, ownership of the PetroBronx collective's activities and branding of its name and work were unclear. Throughout the three years of PetroBronx's existence, no evaluation was carried out of how the collective and its organizational members were doing. In addition, PetroBronx relied heavily on multiple oral narratives and failed to systematically maintain written records of its work as the collective evolved. The success of this organization would have been best captured in intentional record-keeping and evaluation.

Indeed the collective intended to implement an initiative for self-sufficiency and social development, however self-reliance and community asset mapping were hinted at though never planned by the collective. The collective joined with other local efforts for community empowerment, but attempts to develop linkages with ALBA territories outside the US were not successful.

It should be noted that the third party invited by the PetroBronx collective to provide administrative oversight of existing funds is a self-described community foundation viewed by many as progressive in the local philanthropic arena. It is based outside of the Bronx—the specified geographical area of the grantmaking—and was invited to oversee the administration of existing funds. The international corporation's majority shareholder was not informed of the decision. The funds' administrator proved to be a dishonest broker in that it represented the funds as coming from the entity's own philanthropic pool of funds. It also attempted to manipulate members of the collective by presenting itself as the grantor and by sowing seeds of mistrust between the members of PetroBronx and the organizations requesting funding.

The way forward recommended by this project will utilize tools that are developed to ensure transparency, fair distribution of labor and educating member organizations about the roles and responsibilities of grant making, community foundation management and community leadership development.

Forward to a Bronx Community Philanthropy

It is the author's ambition for the current collective to evolve using the framework of communal participation to organize and implement grassroots efforts to improve the South Bronx and create bridges between this section of the Bronx and similarly structured communities locally, nationally and globally. The current collective lacks the financial and legal professionals needed to broaden the assets required for the development of the envisioned community philanthropic entity.

This paper proposes a project that intends to educate participants on the brick laying work of developing community foundation-like entities, would include: community organizers, grassroots activists, and individuals with diverse and rich experiences in community work and knowledge of the history of the community in which they work. Recruitment of participants would begin with members of the PetroBronx collective.

The community service, development and advocacy organizations developed by these South Bronx-based organizers, activists, and advocates provide support for social justice, education, cooperative building, and environmental conservation projects envisioned by South Bronx

communities. These organizations demonstrate incredible efforts towards self-sufficiency, sustainability and social development. In conjunction with other local empowerment efforts, they work to pilot untraditional forms of organizational infrastructure, resource management and control. The collective would aim to reciprocate all support it receives by engaging in solidarity actions with like communities wherever they are located and sharing resources and experience while encouraging input from the people at all stages of the process for transformation at the grassroots level.

The envisioned community philanthropic structure for the Bronx would be developed utilizing tools: to build consensus that seeks to create spaces and opportunities; to evaluate and build agreements within communities that promote indigenous development at the local and regional level with the objective of eliminating poverty; and to correct social inequalities and securing a better quality of life for all residents, while working for their full participation at all levels. What emerges will be an integral component in the wave of a new consciousness awakening and the appearance of a new political, social, and economic leadership in the arena of local people's power.

The author's vision for the development of a community philanthropic mechanism in the Bronx has been sanctioned and encouraged by all to whom the idea has been pitched. Many who have been subjected to her impassioned story-telling have helped birth and/or supported the creation of community foundations and community foundation-like entities throughout the world. *Home grown giving*— the implementation plan for community philanthropy where a community invests in itself, valuing what each member/resident can give or for us by us in the Bronx—will utilize multiple approaches in order to gauge the pulse of the Bronx community and trigger “buy-in.” An example of an approach would be a series of chats at locations where Bronx residents gather – laundromats, houses of worship, community board meetings, non-profit networks and community organization collectives. Through these conversations it would be possible to identify leadership from the various silos in the Bronx. These leaders would then be invited to participate in a series of convening processes to discuss the development and launching of a Bronx community philanthropic entity.

Monica Patten, president and chief executive officer of Community Foundations of Canada, states:

The concept of community has grown more elastic, expanding to include a myriad of connections facilitated by technology, ease of travel and many other societal changes, however there is still something visceral and very powerful about the place we call home.¹³

This view of community and how it fits with community foundation-like ventures would be communicated to and discussed with all levels of stake-holders to shape the path of this effort's implementation. The Muslim Women's Institute for Research and Development-MWIRD will support Nurah W. Amat'ullah to serve as the convener of this undertaking. An initial task

¹³ Monica Patten, “Community Foundations: Where Community Philanthropy and Community Vitality Meet,” *Transition*. Winter 2009.

towards building a Bronx community philanthropy enterprise would be to identify the successes and failures of PetroBronx and compile a set of best practices as a tool for modifying operational processes. Another task will be to educate and propose to the PetroBronx collective and many others the concept of home grown philanthropy in order to initiate this endeavor.

During the 2007-2008 fiscal year, MWIRD conducted a series of community evaluation data collection activities in the Highbridge neighborhood of the southwest Bronx. The activities included a town hall-style meeting of the residents of northern Highbridge and representatives of community-based organizations that serve them; a quality of life survey of households within a ten-block area administered by local college and high school students; and a series of focus group meetings that used the survey form to guide the discussion. Eighty-three persons attended the community meeting; 241 clean surveys were collected for analysis; and 38 residents participated in six focus groups (male and female youth, Muslims and non-Muslims). The data gleaned from these activities will be utilized to inform future convenings. Research will be undertaken to determine if similar data exist for other neighborhoods in the Bronx.

An interview with a senior program officer at a community foundation based in and serving New York City generated the following recommendations and cautions. First, the agenda for the community philanthropic enterprise must be set by the communities in which it will work as a resource developer, grant maker, leader, convener and educator. In launching the community philanthropic entity, the task of resource cultivation has to be intentional and target both private and public dollars. Another task is to examine models utilized to build healthy neighborhoods and communities and to identify ones which are likely to succeed. Also it is advisable to stay abreast of emerging models in other locales.

These suggestions met with the approval of the founding executive director of the Berks County Community Foundation in Pennsylvania. He added the following piece of advice: community foundations need to secure and hold the lead position as a neutral mediator in conflicts over polarizing issues. He contended that on most critical issues ten percent of the people are on either extreme with 80 percent in the middle willing to work towards a consensus. He advised that it is important to focus on the 80 percent who are most likely to be working partners in the new endeavor. Based on the geographical location of the community philanthropic entity envisioned, it is important to accept the reality that the entity may never be rich. Because community development and empowerment occurs one neighborhood at a time, implementation would begin in the Highbridge neighborhood, the home of MWIRD. In studying the possible realization of a Bronx community philanthropic entity, it has become clear that it is necessary to shift the focus to assets and away from deficits. It is also important to be mindful that many models are not replicable and only work in specific contexts. Through the cultivation of hometown pride among Bronxites, a body of sincere folks who are committed to the effort will emerge.

Community foundation-like entities are expanding exponentially around the world and emerging models vary in shape and form in accordance with the context within which they are established. The people of the Bronx will determine the shape and form of their community philanthropic enterprise. Many emerging models prioritize building social capital, i.e. growing human and cultural assets. A caution offered was that it is necessary to determine, from the outset, whether

folks want to solve problems or ignore them because their existence is the source of a compelling narrative that attracts potential resources in the long term.

Dorothy Reynolds, author of the monograph series *Balancing Acts*, offered the following counsel during a recent conversation on how to proceed with the implementation of community philanthropy in the Bronx:

- begin with a community gathering to address needs;
- use broad terms to define community, as this allows one to be as inclusive as possible and attract a broader range of stakeholders.
- highlight the presence of the global south in the Bronx, particularly in the South Bronx, when soliciting support for the convening.

Steps Forward

- A town hall meeting in Highbridge to solicit input from community stakeholders regarding community needs (target date: Martin Luther King, Jr. weekend, January 2011).
- A convening retreat of thirty-three stakeholders¹⁴ to discuss the needs generated at the town hall meeting; use the bucket model to group identified needs; select one bucket to be the launch task of the Bronx Community Philanthropy (target date: President's Day weekend, February 2011).
- Develop the structure of the Bronx Community Philanthropy (target date: fall 2011)

An analysis of findings from processes that precede the implementation of the community philanthropy entity will be the threads with which the Bronx philanthropic fabric will be woven. The costs of the convening will be covered by funds raised from entities that support and encourage the establishment of local community philanthropic endeavors.

¹⁴ This number was selected to allow for a broad cross section of the community to participate in the convening while maintaining the ability to effectively facilitate discussions.

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