

World Café: How might we create a future for community development characterized by imagination, innovation and impact?

World Café Introduction

On January 26 - 27, 2011 the Ohio Conference of Community Development (OCCD) held its 2011 Winter Quarterly meeting in Dublin, Ohio. As part of the program on January 27 Chris Kloth of ChangeWorks of the Heartland (CW) conducted a World Café session focused on the question “How might we create a future for community development characterized by imagination, innovation and impact?” This was an initiative of the Ohio CDC Association (OCDCA) and was jointly hosted by both organizations and sponsored by City of Columbus, Franklin County, Community Development Collaborative of Greater Columbus, and Affordable Housing Trust for Columbus & Franklin County.

The session grew out of a number of conversations among CDC professionals statewide related to the volatility of the last several years of work in communities, particularly the sense of having had to rapidly and repeatedly adapt to national and local economic and political conditions out of their control...”feeling overstimulated by stimulus (money).” Given that the volatility in their larger operating environment will continue, there was an interest in having an opportunity to reflect on what has been learned, what seems to be working and what will be needed to support a CDC community characterized by vitality.

Five questions were designed to help the participants explore the larger question. This document includes an Executive Summary to provide highlights from the dialogues related to each of the five questions.

Executive Summary

Despite the fact that the impetus for this session grew from a reaction to sustained volatility in their work, those who participated share

- a sense of accomplishment,
- a spirit of learning from their own experiences and those of their colleagues,
- the ability and willingness to apply what they learn from one another, even when their local situations may differ,
- an understanding that, while technical knowledge, skills and experience are important, whole system thinking and people skills are essential to making a real difference, and
- a commitment to working together to build on their accomplishments and learning as they move ahead in a world that promises continued volatility and challenges.

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What follows for each question is an indication of common themes related to what has been learned, what works and what will be needed to succeed in the future.

1. Keeping in mind what you have learned and noticed throughout your career, especially your work as part of the CDC community, what knowledge, skills, strategies and relationships are most essential to your effectiveness these days?
 - a. Ability and willingness to adapt and be flexible
 - b. Healthy, open relationships with colleagues, partners and other stakeholders
 - c. Ability and willingness to form and work in authentic partnerships based on legitimate interdependence
 - d. Effective communication skills with a diverse range of individuals, groups and professional disciplines
 - e. Setting clear goals and priorities; staying focused on outcomes & priorities

2. As you reflect on this list of knowledge, skills, strategies and relationships, what significant changes in the important work of the CDC community do you notice and think we need to pay particular attention to?
 - a. What is considered to be within the domain of “community development” has expanded considerably...i.e., community gardens, green building practices, the diversity of partnerships, holistic view of neighborhoods’ needs, employment, microenterprise, etc.
 - b. While there have been political changes at every level, community development continues to be valued...what has changed is what the perceived basis for that value, especially related to the potential for contributing to economic recovery on the micro and macro levels
 - c. The roles of the private sector are different and increasing
 - d. Macroeconomic changes have led to less stability in available financing, but more creativity in how to secure financing - especially through new types of partnerships

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3. As you reflect on the dialogue today, as well as your own work in recent years, please reflect on some examples of successful, high impact community development projects. What key factors contributed to the success of each project?
 - a. Authentic, inclusive partnerships with
 - i. neighborhoods,
 - ii. community members,
 - iii. private and public investors,
 - iv. other service providers, etc.
 - b. Communication/Transparency: Open, honest, clear
 - c. Holistic/systems thinking...expansive view of who cares and who can help
 - d. Build on local strengths and assets to make improvements (in contrast with starting with a problem solving mental model)

4. As you reflect on our dialogue today, how would you define community development in a way that communicates to others outside the CDC community what it does and why it is valuable?
 - a. Community development is the cornerstone that creates sustainable neighborhoods and communities by addressing economic, environmental, and social conditions that lead to self-sufficiency and an increased tax base for future growth and the welfare of communities.
 - b. Individual and community empowerment
 - c. Collaboration among people and systems doing CDC work is both a metaphor and a model for healthy neighborhood and community work...and vice versa!
 - i. Notice, recognize and reward community assets.
 - ii. Set a good example - walk your talk.
 - iii. CDC folks need to be able to learn from what makes particular neighborhood work more or less effectively and look for evidence of the same traits in their assumptions and practices as professionals, partners and leaders

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5. As you reflect on our dialogue today, what do you see emerging as your roles, individually and collectively, in creating and sustaining a positive future for community development?
 - a. In a world of complexity and volatility, healthy, authentic relationships are everything!
 - b. Think, plan and act from a holistic, inclusive, systems perspective...seeking for new potential partners in unexpected places
 - c. Focus on outcomes
 - d. Capture and spread stories of success to influence systems and communities
 - e. Transparency is essential: Communicate up, down, sideways: throughout all parts of the system
 - i. Listen well to others
 - ii. Speak/write in clear, direct, honest and inclusive terms