

Investing in Emerging Leaders in the Community Development Industry

For the past year, the Neighborhood Partnership Fund (NPF) has been developing our Future Leaders Initiative. This initiative focuses on the urgent task of developing a strong core of tomorrow's CDC leaders in Oregon. NPF has worked statewide to build the capacity of community development corporations to provide affordable housing and services for over fifteen years. A large amount of that capacity currently resides in Executive Directors, and our research found that 60 percent may be retiring in the next four years. If we are to preserve the stock of affordable housing and continue to improve low-income communities, we must build a smooth transition from one generation of leadership to the next. NPF's Future Leaders Initiative will help to ensure that we continue the strong results of the last fifteen years of CDC investment by building a critical mass of talent within the Industry in Oregon. The Future Leaders Initiative creates a network of leaders poised to assume leadership of the Community Develop Industry.

Succession issues are garnering national attention. In 2002, the Casey Foundation began to examine what the transition from the Baby Boomer generation to Generations X and Y might mean for the non-profit industry.

The Casey Foundation identified six proactive strategies for CDC's:

- Invest in younger leaders;
- Identify and nurture more leaders of color;
- Make it viable for current Executive Directors to leave;
- Broaden sites of intergenerational discussion;
- Examine current organizations structures and expectations; and
- Promote a healthier balance between work and personal/family life.

NPF's Future Leaders Initiative program model combines training, technical assistance and peer support to address the first three issues. After an extensive application process, eighteen emerging leaders currently employed by our CDC partners have been identified to participate in the program. Participants were recruited with an

A program of the Neighborhood Partnership Fund

emphasis on people of color and people from diverse ethnic or cultural backgrounds as well as an urban and rural mix.

The curriculum has been designed to address issues and topics identified from a number of focus groups held with Executive Directors, Emerging Leaders, Funders and CDC Partners. The curriculum will provide intensive national caliber training in essential leadership and management topics and be able to evolve with the issues that emerge from the participants over the course of the year.

Training will also include a year-long leadership development project that puts learning into practice. Loosely based on NeighborWorks "Achieving Excellence" program model, participants will shape and conduct their learning efforts around specific challenges that will significantly impact their organizations, the field and themselves. Participants will set and hold themselves accountable for achieving goals relevant to their identified challenge.

NPF will provide coaching, peer group collaboration, and financial support to participants to help them complete and implement their projects. Participants will receive one-on-one coaching around their "leadership challenge" as well as coaching around their skill development. Because participants will come from a number of different counties in Oregon, on-line training will be used to supplement face-to-face sessions, build upon topics from previous sessions and prepare participants for upcoming topics.

By developing a training initiative that enhances the competencies of emerging leaders and builds a depth of leadership and CDC knowledge, NPF believes that we can better protect the long-term stability of the CDC industry and portfolio in Oregon.

Goals of the Future Leaders Initiative are to:

- Address the CDC succession crisis by developing new leadership within the industry that has a broad understanding of the industry and a grounding in the management tools needed to help CDC's evolve;
- Diversify the leadership base of Oregon's CDC industry – recruit and nurture leaders of color, leaders with a grasp of cultural and class issues, and leaders with a commitment to and roots in rural Oregon; and
- Create a support network among emerging leaders. Such a network will enhance job satisfaction as well as institutionalize standards for sound program design and evaluation.

A snapshot of FLI participants:

- 18 Emerging Leaders from across the state of Oregon and the CDC Industry;
- 12 of the 18 Emerging leaders are from urban areas, with one from a suburban county and five from rural Oregon;
- 7 of the Emerging Leaders are leaders of color;
- 10 of the Emerging Leaders are women; and
- 3 are from outside the Industry but have ties to Community Development.