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EFFECTIVE ORGANIZATIONS

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The Learning Conference 2011
Draft Program
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		Networking Breakfast *(7:30-8:30)*
8:00		
		Breakout Round A
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	Pre-Conference Sessions	
10:00		BREAK
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11:00		
12:00	Opening Plenary Luncheon	Closing Plenary Luncheon
1:00		
2:00	BREAK	
	Short Talks	Post-Conference Sessions
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4:00	Open Space/ Facilitated Conversations *(4:15-5:30)*	
5:00		
	Welcome Reception	
6:00		
	BREAK	
7:00	Dine Arounds *(7:00 and on)*	

Monday, June 6, 2011

9:30-11:30   Pre-Conference Sessions

Evaluation in Philanthropy: Five Approaches to Effective Learning
Session Designer: Jason Twiss, GEO

A pioneering group of grantmakers is redefining the role of evaluation in philanthropy — it's not solely about tracking the results and the impact of past philanthropic investments. It is also about learning how to do a better job of achieving our goals moving forward. In this hands-on workshop offered by GEO, participants will explore five key approaches to learning that many grantmakers are adopting in order to effectively improve programs and results, and gain practical tools for how they can build these approaches into their own work. Advanced registration is required. *Please note: This session is good for people who have never been to a GEO learning conference before and/or people who are new to evaluation.*

12:00-2:00   Opening Plenary Luncheon

Grantmakers and grantees alike need real-time information in order to achieve better results. And yet, effectively engaging nonprofits, community members, other funders and government agencies in learning is one of the key challenges grantmakers face today. Gain a fresh perspective from outside philanthropy on how key stakeholders can come together around common goals and metrics, engage in shared reflection about what they've learned, and use those results to make changes and drive impact. *Speakers pending.*

2:00-2:30   BREAK

2:30-4:00   Short Talks

In a new format this year, GEO will host a series of short, 15-20 minute talks by thought leaders about provocative, innovative or challenging ideas.

1. Philanthropy's Albatross: Debunking Theories of Change
Many foundations tout the importance of theories of change for effective grantmaking and require their grantees to include them in grant proposals. In this session, Albert Ruesga of Greater New Orleans Foundation will argue that there's little need for this requirement since most grantees already do a sufficiently good job of describing the reasons behind their program designs and what they plan to accomplish. Requiring grantees to produce explicit theories of change beyond what they usually include in their grant proposals does little to improve the art or science of grantmaking.
Speaker: Albert Ruesga, Greater New Orleans Foundation

2. The Substance of Story
Storytelling is simultaneously the favorite and most-hated buzzword of the moment in philanthropy. We tell stories, but then what? Do we actually *use* the stories we tell and hear? Are stories part of philanthropy's core business, or peripheral? Are some stories worth the telling, while others should be ignored? How do we know the difference? Using visual demonstrations, Melanie Moore from See Change, Inc. will explore the value of storytelling for advancing learning goals, critique the ways we currently use and misuse stories in our work presently and suggest a rigorous approach to storytelling for both story creators and story "consumers."
Speaker: Melanie Moore, See Change, Inc.

3. Sunsetting: Creating Urgency to Achieve Outcomes
If your organization had only five years left, what would you set out to accomplish? How would you change the way you're thinking about learning to ensure desired results? How would your board and staff refocus its expectations? These are the questions CEOs for Cities had to answer when it set its sunset date of 2016. Hear from Carol Coletta of CEO for Cities on the power of sunsetting for creating a sense of urgency to identify and achieve outcomes for organizations and their partners.
Speaker: Carol Coletta, CEOs for Cities

4. Rethinking What Counts as "Evidence"
The Obama Administration has put emphasis on funding "what works", and federal initiatives such as the Social Innovation Fund, the Investing in Innovation Fund (i3) and Promise Neighborhoods are designed to grow the impact of programs. This approach seems sensible on the surface, but what does it mean? Lisbeth Schorr of Harvard Medical School will explain why prevailing, narrow definitions of what counts as evidence will limit our ability to make progress on social issues. Instead, Schorr promotes a more inclusive approach to judging what works that shifts away from success-or-failure judgments to a richer knowledge base about approaches that are plausible, promising or proven.
Speaker: Lisbeth Schorr, Harvard Medical School

4:00-4:15   BREAK

4:15-5:30   Open Space/ Facilitated Conversations

In response to feedback that one of the greatest benefits of GEO conferences is access to a community of like-minded colleagues, GEO is offering a forum for attendees to connect with one another at the end of the day Monday to discuss topics important to their work. Join a discussion with a Short Talk speaker, form a small group discussion on a topic of interest, or use the time to meet with the colleagues you were hoping to see at the conference.

5:30-6:30   Welcome Reception

Join your grantmaking colleagues for a lively reception at the end of the day on Monday. Enjoy light refreshments and network with conference attendees in the historic Marble Room.

6:30-7:00   BREAK

7:00 and on   Dine Arounds

Join a group of your colleagues for dinner and conversation at a local Baltimore establishment. You can view location options and sign-up for a group at the registration area. Dine Arounds are being organized by GEO's local partner for the conference, the Association of Baltimore Area Grantmakers.

Tuesday, June 7, 2011

7:30-8:30   Networking Breakfast

Enjoy a continental breakfast as you network with other conference attendees.

8:30-10:00   Breakout Round A

1. Developing a Strategic Learning and Evaluation System
Session Designer: Hallie Preskill, FSG Social Impact Advisors
Grantmakers and nonprofits increasingly are making investments in evaluation-related activities, but most evaluations are undertaken when a need arises, as part of a particular initiative or during grantee reporting. These one-off evaluations provide little opportunity to think about how they can serve the organization's strategic thinking, learning across evaluations and the allocation of evaluation resources across programs. Hear from a number of grantmakers who are developing Strategic Learning and Evaluation Systems that build proactive, integrated and responsive learning processes to inform decision making.

2. Bolstering Real-Time Learning and Course Correction
Session Designer: Marilyn Darling, Signet Research & Consulting
A growing number of grantmakers are committing to becoming a "learning organization," but many are facing a mismatch between words and actions. Before- and after-action reviews and tools for mid-course corrections can provide real-time and grounded information for program staff and other key stakeholders. Hear from grantmakers who are using these learning tools and explore how and when to weave them into the grantmaking cycle.

3. Assessing Network Effectiveness
Session Designer: Gale Berkowitz, The David and Lucille Packard Foundation
Over the past few years there has been a growing acknowledgment that philanthropic investments in networks can be as or even more important to achieving social impact than investing in individual organizations alone. However, assessing the effectiveness of these networks is complicated. Evaluations of networks need to consider networks both as means and ends, as important capacity in a community and as instruments of transformation and achieving results. Hear from a panel of practitioners on frameworks for defining and assessing networks, methods and tools for evaluating them, and examples of some networks and their evaluations currently in progress.

4. Using Evidence to Elevate Promising Programs
Session Designer: Sinead Keegan, NYC Center for Economic Opportunity
By emphasizing evidenced-based programs that focus on work, skills-building, and asset development, a number of grantmakers are finding new ways to elevate promising anti-poverty initiatives. The Mayor's Fund to Advance New York City and the Center for Economic Opportunity's Social Innovation Fund are working to build a broader and more compelling evidence base about the effectiveness of programs in the city. Hear from a panel of leaders who have been working in partnership with other cities to build support for sustainable models to reduce urban poverty.

10:00-10:30   BREAK

10:30-12:00   Breakout Round B

1. Designing a Participatory Learning Agenda
Session Designer: Peter Laugharn, Firelight Foundation
It can be challenging for grantmakers to identify common learning themes and impact trends across their portfolios. This is even more challenging for "responsive" funders that support projects as they emerge from grantees without requiring them to fit into an overarching grantmaking strategy. As a responsive funder, the Firelight Foundation has designed a learning agenda with broad questions to help identify and track community-based actions regardless of the particular focus of the grant. Hear from those working with key stakeholders to successfully implement Firelight's learning agenda across a variety of types of grants and grantees.

2. Implementing the Sweet 16 of Communication Success
Session Designer: Dennis Poplin, Spitfire Strategies
Foundations and nonprofits working to achieve social change must leverage every asset to make progress, including communications and communications for learning. Communications is more about quality than quantity, and using communications effectively isn't about size or budget. It's about being strategic with the resources and opportunities available. In this session, participants will assess their knowledge of the 16 things every organization needs to do to be a communicating organization, and learn how to use the assessment to build learning and guide capacity-building efforts with grantees.

3. Creating Communities of Practice that Accelerate Learning
Session Designer: Tanya Beer, Center for Evaluation Innovation
Communities of practice can be powerful tools for managing knowledge and accelerating learning, replication and scaling. Because these communities are intentional, voluntary and unbound by geography, they can cross-pollinate ideas and spark improvements outside the scope of participants' existing resource networks. Grantmakers can play a powerful role in bringing together and fostering these communities of practice, but doing the work effectively requires skill, time and commitment. Using your own experiences as a backdrop, learn strategies and tools for creating, managing and improving communities of practice, and explore instances where they have led to improved results.

4. Building Grantee and Community Evaluative Capacity
Session Designer: Vignetta Eugenia Charles, National AIDS Fund
Many community-based organizations lack the capacity to conduct comprehensive evaluations or view evaluation beyond the context of meeting funder requirements, yet having real-time data to make improvements and ensure quality of programs is a key to their success. Both the National AIDS Fund and the Foundation for a Healthy Kentucky are working to build learning capacity in their grantees and potential grantees by providing access to evaluation support and helping plan for evaluation capacity building. Hear from these grantmakers how they are effectively balancing the need to fund programs that demonstrate measurable impact with the need to provide resources to high need communities.

12:00-2:00   Closing Plenary Luncheon

Many change agents in philanthropy seek to identify and adopt proven learning and evaluation practices that can bring real improvements to our work. But even when we know what needs to be done, closing the gap between theory and practice is an ever-present challenge. Synthesize with peers what you've learned during the conference and dig deeper into what it will take to implement lasting changes in your work. *Speakers pending.*

<u>Doing Due Diligence Well</u>
Session Designer: Leonor Alfonso, GEO
Selecting the right grantee partners is one of the most important jobs grantmakers do. Effective due diligence involves striking a balance between obtaining the information you want and need as a grantmaker and not asking for so much that it places an undue burden on the grantseeker. Knowing what to ask, when to ask it and how to structure information-gathering to best support decisions is still a challenge for many grantmakers. In this hands-on workshop offered by La Piana Consulting and GEO, participants will explore effective grant assessment practices and identify changes they can make to their own due diligence. Advanced registration is required.