CORE & CORE PILOT / FOUNDERS’ CIRCLE INTRO

From Remarks at the CORE Xchange and Center for Change Networking Gathering, SEPT. 12, 2012

Becca’s Remarks:

Like many great ideas, CORE was prompted by frustration—mine, in particular. Since I was a young child and realized that there were people suffering due to poverty and prejudice, I have worked for social change in one way or another. Eventually, I found myself in the role of lead staff person for a startup non-profit organization. Like many people who end up as executive directors, I had no idea how to do about 80% of my job. I needed a lot of help. Sometimes I got what I needed. And sometimes not. And sometimes I was just too mired in the day-to-day urgency of the job to even step back and wonder whether I was being effective, and whether and where I might get help to make my efforts more skillful and sustainable. After that job I became a consultant and a funder; two new roles that I also didn’t know how to do well. How, as an outside facilitator and a leadership coach, could I tell if I was really making a difference to my clients? And how, as a grantmaker, could I make the best use of the money entrusted to me?

CORE is informed by all of these experiences working to make change. We are not just a network of consultants improving our work with nonprofit organizations, though we are that. We are also not just a new way to fund the organizational capacity building process, though we are also that. The CORE network includes people engaged in social change, social justice, advocacy and community building in a wide variety of roles—from nonprofit and grassroots leaders, to consultants and trainers, to philanthropists and funders, and others dedicated to making the world a better place. When we began talking about this a couple of years ago, we had this diagram of three separate circles that we wanted to bring together – Organizations, Consultants, and Funders. Rather than letting our different roles divide us, we are looking at transforming the whole system by which we build our capacity for change. We are a **network** of individuals and organizations expanding our **collective** capacity for community change-making by **reorganizing** how we work together for change.

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You can still see the three circles in this diagram, but what’s important, is what is in the middle of this picture; our shared commitment to change-making. We also share a commitment to a set of methods for changing the way we do change: cultivating **relationships** and facilitating **reflection** in order to increase the **effectiveness**, sustainability and joyfulness of our efforts.

We cultivate **relationships** where we can get to know and trust each other; each others’ integrity, each others’ motivation to make change, and each others’ skills for doing so. And those relationships allow a kind of **reflection** where we can get beyond urgency and judgment and trying to prove ourselves, to a place of curiosity and learning about what is working and how to move forward more effectively. And by **effectiveness**, we don’t mean just getting a good evaluation so you can get the funding or get the next client or as a funder get the approval of your board. We mean true excellence, and even elegance – finding the right strategy to be able to work smarter, not harder, and to bring about true social transformation.

We have been acting on these ideas as we’ve organized peer learning and networking events for consultants. We’ve already seen some benefits from this; some of us have begun referring more clients to each other, and some of us even created a non-violence training called “prepared + peaceful” that we delivered down at the capitol during the protests last year, as a direct result of getting to know each other through the CORE network.

Now, we are about to launch a pilot to test how we can apply our methods to the whole system of change-making, by using relationship-building and reflection to connect the right people and resources at the right time for the right capacity building project. Here’s how it will work. Later this fall we will issue an invitation to capacity-building consultants and trainers and to nonprofit and community benefit organizations who are ready to engage outside support to build their capacity.

We’ll have a team of interviewers from the field meet with applicants, learn about their strengths and growing edges and, through a unique, facilitated process, make recommendations about potential high-leverage, well-fitting consulting engagements. We expect that this process, by itself, will increase our collective capacity to make change, through the relationship building and reflection involved.

But it won’t end there. With the interview team’s recommendations in hand, applicant organizations will be invited to select one of the recommended consultants and, depending on the amount of funding CORE has available, we will offer financial and contracting assistance for 2 or 3 of these projects, to begin early next year. We will follow up after a few months with everyone involved to hear how things are going and share lessons learned with the wider community of interested change-makers.

**This is where you come in**. Are you ready to be part of a new approach to community change-making where we all work together to develop the know-how and resources we need to make the biggest difference we can?

If you see yourself in this vision, there are a number of ways to get more involved. One important way is to make a financial contribution. We invite you to join our new Founders’ Circle—a special group of people and organizations willing to commit early financial resources so we can expand the reach of our work. You can learn more about the Founders’ Circle and how to join it here [insert link] and we welcome your contribution today. As a special thank-you gift, each contribution of $75 or more made between now and December 1st earns a discount of $25 off Center for Change [insert link] membership. Our goal is to raise $5,000 before December 1st so we can support an additional consulting engagement during the pilot—and if we raise more, we’ll expand the pilot even further! And as a member of the Founders’ Circle you will be part of the learning community that explores these ideas together.

We also invite you to join our general email list if you’re not yet on it, sign up here [insert link], or email corestaff123@gmail.com. Watch the email list and web site for invitations to our next XChange networking and learning event (save the date: November 13 from 10:00 am – 12:00 noon) and for updates on the pilot.

Mary Girard’s Remarks:

Thank you Becca, I've been working with the Dane County TimeBank for the past year as the Financial Manager.  I've been representing the TimeBank on the CORE Steering Team.  For those who don't know TimeBanking is a mutual exchange system and can be another tool to build these essential relationships that Becca was talking about earlier.  The Dane County TimeBank also is working towards engaging organizations, individuals, consultants and funders to work together to build community and make change.  The CORE team is exploring ways to incorporate TimeBanking in our work and the upcoming pilot.  We also hosted an XChange to discuss how to engage timebanking with consulting.

Just a couple of years ago I returned to Madison after 22 years and was very glad to see the rich culture of social change the vast number of organizations and individuals committed to making our world a better place.  However I quickly recognized that this culture still had the same frustrations that Becca mentioned, what I call the tyranny of the urgent as well as competition for scarce resources.  I have learned a great deal this past year taking this journey with the CORE team. The up-coming pilot applies a community organizing and collaboration approach to capacity building that I believe needs to be tried and tested. It is for this reason that I made the commitment to become a Founder.

The Dane County TimeBank is now taking this discount opportunity to become a member of the Center for Change.  The Center provides a great venue (as you can see) and resource.  Both CORE and the TimeBank have benefited from using office and meeting space and equipment as well as receiving valuable professional services and training.

Please feel free to speak talk with me more about the benefits of being part of the CORE Founders' Circle and the Center for Change.  Now I'll turn it back to Crystel for some final comments.