



**Community Activation Network: CAN
First Organizing Meeting
August 11, 2020**

Meeting Notes

Members of the Center for Nonprofit Excellence’s Community Activation Network (CAN) initiative met for the first time via teleconference call on August 11, 2020.

The agenda for the meeting was as follows:

- Welcome and agenda overview
- Introductions
- Review of CAN purpose and guiding principles
- Small group discussion and report out
 - What does a thriving nonprofit/social impact sector look like?
 - Which of these Guiding Principles will be most helpful in supporting a thriving ecosystem?
- Review of summary and themes of pilot interviews
- Small group discussion and report out
 - Any reaction or thoughts about the questionnaire itself or the themes?
 - Who and how to invite the next members (by next meeting)? Who is not in the room that needs to be? How do we onboard new members?
 - Other general questions and comments?
- Next steps and adjournment

Introductions

CAN members were asked to introduce themselves by sharing their name, organization, and their hopes and fears for this initiative and its work.

Fears shared included:

- We don’t seize the opportunity, we don’t do the hard work, and we don’t reimagine the future and make real change. Instead, we fall into old traps:
 - Analysis paralysis
 - Gradualism
 - Lip service but not action
 - “Task force to death” potential solutions and actions
 - Revert to what is comfortable and currently accepted
 - Let the “how” get in the way of the “why”
 - Become an insular, self-congratulatory group
 - Forget to identify what is working now and lose it in pursuit of the new
 - Develop a series of reports that languish on a shelf somewhere

- We miss the opportunity to create equity. Instead we stay divided, segregated, disunified. Or we settle for tokenism.
- We will not honor, or even take seriously, the struggle involved in working for racial justice and the trauma associated with that struggle.
- Nonprofits will not get the resources that they need to resolve the real issues, meet the real need. That resources will be directed only to the “next cool thing” and/or the usual suspects. That Southern Indiana will be overlooked, even though it has the same issues.
- Though well-meaning in our activity, we will inadvertently blunder into doing more harm than good. That we will repeat the worst parts of history, not the best.

Hopes shared included:

- We sustain the energy, momentum, sense of urgency. We lead boldly and act.
- We finally do better and make systemic change and create lasting good. We create a new normal. Praxis!
- We see leaders in the community beyond the usual suspects; we develop the next generation of leaders.
- We are driven by data—but we bring order and sequence to its collection, analysis, and the action based on it. We are clear about who is doing what when. We reflect, evaluate, and learn. And we are clear and honest about the timeframes involved in systemic change.
- We will build a broad, representative CAN community that includes those outside of the typical networks, especially young and marginalized people. A community where everyone is seen and felt. Where everyone’s opinions, knowledge, and expertise are shared and respected.
- The nonprofit sector comes to a clear understanding of itself, recognizes and claims its expertise and leadership within the broader community, and finds its voice. That it stops the habitual comparison of itself to sectors in other communities.

Review of CAN purpose and guiding principles and small group discussion and report out

CAN members then reviewed the initiative’s guiding principles:

1. Ensure authentic diversity, equity, and inclusion through all CAN work
2. Co-create priorities with a bias toward action and change
3. Share learning and ownership throughout the sector
4. Value strength of relationships over strength of individuals (power *with* vs power *over*)
5. Expand what is good and assess opportunities for growth
6. Share and be a catalyst for connections, access, information, and resource flow
7. Exemplify and advocate

Members were then divided into small groups and asked to consider the following questions:

- What does a thriving nonprofit/social impact sector look like?
- Which of these guiding principles will be most helpful in supporting a thriving ecosystem?

After the small group discussion, members reconvened in the large group and a member of each small group reported out a summary of the group's discussion. Responses to the question "What does a thriving nonprofit/social impact sector look like?" were wide-ranging and included:

- Organizations within the sector are connected, aligned, organized, and intentionally oriented toward a common vision for the larger community.
- Organizations within the sector are open to deep, efficient collaborations and mergers—even closure—to focus resources and emphasize broad mission accomplishment over individual organization sustainability.
- Organizations share resources, information, data.
- Power dynamics within the sector are acknowledged and managed equitably. Communication within the sector is honest and candid. There is no "us vs. them" mentality; "power with, not power over."
- The sector behaves as an ecosystem: it adapts, evolves, changes, learns.
- The sector never forgets who it is serving.

In response to the question "Which of these Guiding Principles will be most helpful in supporting a thriving ecosystem?" the following were stated, in order of highest frequency to lowest:

- #6 Share and be a catalyst for connections, access, information and resource flow
- #4 Value strength of relationships over strength of individuals (power with vs power over)
- #2 Co-create priorities with a bias toward action and change
- #1 Ensure authentic diversity, equity and inclusion through all CAN work
- #5 Expand what is good and assess opportunities for growth

Review of summary of pilot interviews and small group discussion and report out

CAN members then reviewed a summary of the responses from the pilot interviews that were conducted previously online. Members learned that four themes emerged from the responses:

- Collaboration
- Funding Flexibility and Innovation
- Equity and Inclusion
- Awareness, Understanding, and Trust

Members were then divided into small groups and asked to consider the following questions:

- Any reaction or thoughts about the questionnaire itself or the themes?
- Who and how to invite the next members (by next meeting)? Who is not in the room that needs to be? How do we onboard new members?
- Other general questions and comments?

After the small group discussions, members reconvened in the large group and a member of each small group reported out a summary of their discussion. Responses were wide-ranging and included:

- Barriers to the distribution of funds are considerable and are often the result of systemic bias within the sector. Grant application processes and reporting requirements are rigid and vary from funder to funder. Funders are influenced by concerns about preserving the corpus. The process for distributing funding should be less onerous and bureaucratic with a bias toward quick action.
- Community conversations about the most pressing needs could help drive public funding. Are we insulating the community from funding decisions?
- Collaboration throughout the sector is needed to tackle the larger issues. Break down larger issues into smaller pieces and work together to resolve.
- Collaboration requires trust, however. We need to build trust throughout the sector and advocate for one another.
- We need to open a space for innovation within the sector and give permission to fail; we need to allow for disruption—whatever our plans may be.
- We need to be intentional about developing the next generation of leadership—both within nonprofit organizations and foundations. Invite them into the conversations now.
- We need to determine a strategy to expand CAN expeditiously. We should consider inviting the people we serve (our clients) to be a part of CAN.

Next steps and adjournment

The following next steps were identified:

- Ann Coffey will send a SurveyMonkey survey to elicit comments that didn't get aired in the reporting out.
- We'll test monthly meetings to start. Ann Coffey will send a doodle poll to see if we can find a date monthly that works for all or majority.
- Ann will invite the members of the Equity in Philanthropy Project, a group of young professionals who are passionate about this topic.

With no further business to conduct, the meeting was adjourned.