

Tele-learning Event – Thursday, September 30, 2005
Engaging Business Tele-Learning Series
Summary of Conversation with John Weiser

What was the Ford Foundation's reason for putting together the Corporate Initiative? What were its goals?

The over arching goal of the CI initiative is to leverage private sector expertise and resources to expand income and wealth for low income individuals and communities while providing economic benefits to businesses as well. The two objectives of the initiative were to:

- ***Demonstrate win-win strategies.*** *The Foundation supported research, projects and advocacy to demonstrate specific ways in which core business sector resources can help low-income individuals and communities build their human and financial assets.*
- ***Build the capacity of the CI field.*** *The Foundation seeks to build sustainable capacity within the CI field to promote, develop and diffuse CI practices that support both strategic business interests and asset building for low-income individuals and communities.*

The research piece in the CI initiative was a long-term exercise – eight years. It was carried out by a large and talented research team and shaped by a very engaged and credible advisory group. It was also noticeable in that you based your study on the experience and perspectives of a wide range of people. Who did you involve in the research?

The Ford Foundation made over 50 grants over the 8 year period and we went to all of these non profit leaders and conducted three hour interviews, interviewing:

- *Nonprofits with economic development expertise who partnered with business to implement market-based solutions*
- *Think tanks that were engaged in research and policy analysis.*
- *Business associations that provided capacity building assistance to businesses or helped organize them to act collectively to address problems*
- *Business schools that helped build leadership*

Corporate social responsibility. Strategic philanthropy. We hear more and more about it all the time. Why is the business community becoming more and more interested in becoming directly involved in creating win-win opportunities in low-income communities?

- *Demographic changes and globalization have increased the importance of international markets and more diverse workforces and supplier relations.*
- *Technology and knowledge based economy require strong workforce development systems.*
- *Saturation of suburban markets prompting search for untapped markets.*
- *Society – consumer, governments, unions – placing demands on private sector for ethical practices and behaviors.*

- *New Federal regulations – provide incentives/require businesses to locate and invest in low-income communities (may be U.S experience).*

These broad trends are affecting the private sector across the board, but your team found it important to state that each of these trends affects businesses differently and that one should approach each firm or market on a case-by-case basis.

Yes. Businesses vary in sector, size, location, competitive position, legal structure and leadership values. This will affect if and how a community group can best engage them in creating opportunities for low-income people and communities.

Small business, for instance, may not have the staff to commit to extra involvements, or they may not have the knowledge, in HR, for example, to pursue issues. However, small businesses are more committed to their community, which can make it easier to help them see why it makes sense for them to get involved. In addition, it is often easier to reach the owner of the business when it's a small enterprise, and small businesses work on a longer time frame.

You have found that businesses can create assets and income for low-income people and communities through seven core business operations. Can you highlight these?

1. *Leadership*
2. *Market and Product Development – i.e. Fannie Mae, a company in the US which purchases loans from banks*
3. *Human Resources – i.e. Manpower, which developed its TechReach program in partnership with community organizations.*
4. *External Affairs*
5. *Supply Chain Management – i.e. Transfair , which helps support enterprise development among farmers & cooperatives*
6. *Finance*
7. *Facilities*

Is there always a business case for getting businesses involved in an initiative which a community network might prepare for their consideration?

You've got to create a social win and a business win in order to make the case.

The report describes a six-step process a community group can use to engage and sustain corporate involvement in win-win strategies. It's practical, structured and methodical. Can you give us a summary of the steps?

1. *Establish CED goals.*
2. *Assess whether there is a market solution.*
3. *Analyze the market changes required.*
4. *Determine key levers for change.*
5. *Develop and implement a CI strategy.*
6. *Evaluate progress and adjust strategy.*

What is your favorite win-win story?

The National Home Safety Partnership, a successful program for increasing home safety and reducing insurance losses. (page six in report)