Peer Networking and Community Change

Experiences of the Annie E. Casey Foundation

The Annie E. Casey Foundation

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Executive Summary

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Peer networking is a problem-solving and decision-making approach built on *interaction*, both structured and informal, among two or more people defined as "equals" by their similar goals and interests, job roles or place in a community. Peers come together to exchange information, disseminate good practices, and build leadership structure for work they do together, such as a community change initiative.

A two-year study of the Annie E. Casey Foundation's peer networking activities focused on how they support the Foundation's interests in community change and improving philanthropic practice. Results include both good practices and challenges of peer networking, and how these might be applied by Casey and other grantmakers.

How Peer Networking Evolved at the Annie E. Casey Foundation

Systematic use of peer networking approaches emerged from Casey's system reform work beginning in the 1990's. As part of this work, multi-site initiatives were shaped by numerous convenings of philanthropic and community peers. Activities expanded in the mid-1990s, as Casey developed a five-year plan and strategic framework, then obtained diverse input about them through "consultative sessions" involving nearly 600 stakeholders. The success of these approaches led to an organizational philosophy that "conversation matters" in the process of change, and that peer networking is a useful strategy for encouraging conversation.

The early success of Casey's Children and Family Fellowship Alumni Network gave it a high profile in the Foundation. Coupled with extensive use of peer networking in Casey's multi-site *Making Connections* initiative, this success encouraged wider application of the peer networking approaches examined in this study.

Peer Networking Activities Studied

A total of 19 peer networking activities were studied (see list at end). They included 13 that were funded and coordinated directly by Casey. Participants in these activities included Casey staff, staff of other foundations, and a variety of community leaders. Six other peer networking activities were examined in which Casey was a participant along with other foundations.

To learn about these activities, interviews were combined with document review. Interviewees included Casey staff, other philanthropic and community participants in the peer networking activities, and thought leaders in philanthropy.

An Example of Casey's Peer Networking

At each of about four meetings a year of the ***Urban Child Welfare Leaders Group***, approximately 20 commissioners or directors (and their deputies) of child welfare agencies in big American cities come together to talk about the unique challenges they face. They discuss frankly the many challenges of running a complex child welfare system in an urban setting, and they listen to experts who talk about topics like older youth aging out of care, or court reform. The goal is to lift up specific problems a member wants the group's help to solve, and also to "move the field" towards systems change, including but not limited to the kinds of change the Annie E. Casey Foundation is promoting for vulnerable kids and families.

The Group's members pay their own way (Casey covers hotel and meeting expenses), and they set their own agenda (with support from Casey staff). One meeting a year is planned in collaboration with the Pew Commission on Child Welfare. The Commission helped fund a recent meeting on court reform, which included a strategic session on the regional level with court personnel and advocates. The Group now is operated by the Annie E. Casey Foundation in collaboration with Casey Family Programs.

Though small, this peer network represents more than 50 percent of all "kids in care" in the United States. Thus it can have significant impact on how child welfare services are organized and delivered, and offer leadership for many communities not represented at its meetings.

Ten Good Practices of Peer Networking

Study results indicate that internal and external peer networking activities of the Annie E. Casey Foundation were seen as successful because they:

• Provide a safe, trustful place for participants to interact on topics important to them

• Encourage personal as well as professional interactions among participants

• Customize the peer networking structure to meet specific participant needs

• Promote opportunities for the participants and their organizations to collaborate

• Encourage participant feedback about the strengths and challenges of peer networking

• Build the activity's initial success before broadening its range of participants

• Offer resources for participants to translate ideas into action

• Create sub-groups within the peer networking activity to focus on particular topics of interest

• Shape the activity by analyzing the successes of other peer networking activities

• Level the playing field by sharing basic information about the focal area of peer networking

In addition, the peer networking activities studied reflected, to varying degrees, a dynamic balance between structure and informality – defined by Peters & Waterman in their 1987 book *In Search of Excellence* as "simultaneous loose-tight properties." They were structured enough to promote continuity and follow-through. But they also were informal enough to encourage candid conversation and adaptability to whatever the participants thought should be discussed.

Ten Challenges of Peer Networking

The research also identified several drawbacks or limitations of Casey's peer networking activities, along with operating strategies that are important but difficult to implement:

• Peer networking is costly in both time and money

• Participants in peer networking may find it difficult to take action on good ideas they've developed

• The goals of peer networking may be difficult to identify and to share with others

• Peer networking may be difficult to integrate with other activities of its sponsor

• It may be challenging to balance equality with expertise in selecting peer networking participants

• Organizational complexity and culture of a peer networking sponsor may limit chances for success

• It may be challenging to develop a good exit strategy for a peer networking activity

• Replicating peer networking activities may be difficult

• Participant turnover may limit the success of peer networking

• Individual and group psychological factors may limit the success of peer networking

Key Questions for Creating or Enhancing Peer Networks

Learnings from the 19 peer networks studied in this research inspired questions that might be used as a checklist for those who are deciding whether to create a peer network, how to implement it, or how to evaluate/enhance its operations:

• Who comes to the table as a peer? (e.g., are peers at the right levels in their organizations or communities?)

• Who facilitates the peer network? (e.g., its funder or a third party)

• What process and structure are needed for peer network meetings?

• What can be done to facilitate additional networking outside of peer network meetings?

• What resources are needed to operate the peer network?

• What policy needs to be developed for peer communications, both inside and outside?

• What relationships can be established with other peer networking activities?

• What measures of success are possible, and how can these be used to improve the peer network?

• What relationship does the peer network have to other organizational or community activities?

• What kind of exit strategy is needed, and how will network members know when to implement it?

Key Questions for Creating or Enhancing Peer Matching Systems

Although only one peer matching system (TARC) was examined in this study, considerable data are available from other research about its operation and successes, leading to another set of key questions that might be used by those planning, implementing, or enhancing/evaluating a peer matching activity:

• What are the specific purposes of the peer matching? (what is needed, not just what is wanted)

• Who needs to be present from both sides of the peer match?

• How will each side benefit from participating from the peer match?

• Who facilitates the peer matching?

• What resources are needed for peer matching?

• What measures of success are possible, and how can these be used to improve the peer matching activity?

• What relationship does the peer match have to other organizational or community activities?

• What kinds of follow-up to the peer matching are needed?

The good practices and challenges identified by this study might also be used alongside the two sets of key questions presented here, to guide brainstorming about peer networks and peer matching at any stage of their life cycles.

Acting on the Study's Results

Study findings suggest six ways in which the Annie E. Casey Foundation might expand and enhance its use of peer networking strategies:

(1) Integrate these peer networking strategies internally with the Foundation's philanthropic strategy;

(2) Disseminate learnings about peer networking through Casey's internal Knowledge Management system;

(3) Hold a Casey "consultative session" to synthesize and advance knowledge on peer networking;

(4) Promote links of Casey peer networks to other networks in philanthropy and community change, both internal and external;

(5) Explore refinements in peer networking, such as low-cost approaches (many of the activities studied here are relatively costly to implement) and improved methods for including community residents; and

(6) Evaluate more rigorously the impact of Casey's peer networking activities.

The study report also discusses how to place peer networking in the larger context of *transformational change for foundations* – how foundations re-shape their philanthropic strategy and their overall approaches to dealing with change, using approaches like peer networking. Casey has used peer networking activities to increase active involvement of stakeholders in its initiatives, and to promote Casey's greater involvement in peer learning with other foundations. This represents a significant change in the Foundation's philanthropic strategy.

Comparisons also are made in the report with peer networking and transformational change approaches of other foundations, and with use of these methods in the private sector. These discussions raise additional issues that Casey and other foundations may consider in contemplating future uses of peer networking – as a strategy for promoting community change and for improving philanthropic practice.

PEER NETWORKING ACTIVITIES STUDIED

Casey-Coordinated Peer Networking
Child Welfare Training Directors Group
Children and Family Fellows Alumni Network
Community Foundation Exchange
Family Strengthening Awards
Language Access Network
Leadership in Action Program
Making Connections Local Coordinators Network
Making Connections Resident Leadership Network
Making Connections Social Network
National Partners Network
TARC Peer Matching
United Way Training Program
Urban Child Welfare Leaders Group

Externally-Coordinated Peer Networking
Casey/CSSP Alliance for Race Equity in Child Welfare
Lead Program Executives Group
Leadership Development Funder Affinity Network
Long-Term Funders Exchange
National Rural Funders Collaborative
PRI Makers Network

FOREWORD

Ralph Smith
Executive Vice President
The Annie E. Casey Foundation

"Learn by doing. Learn while doing. Learn together." While not yet a mantra, this linked admonition is proving a core marker of how the Annie E. Casey Foundation (Casey) approaches its work and its relationships with staff, grantees, consultants, partners and co-investors.

Like many in philanthropy, we work at the edges of what we know in order to test the hypotheses that embody our hopes. We often are challenged to figure out how to braid the knowledge garnered from discipline research with the knowledge distilled from practice, and that earned through lived experience. That braiding happens best and matters most when achieved in the crucible of practice as an intentional product of people determined to learn what they need to know.

The nineteen activities captured in this report provide a window onto one path to learning. As this study shows, over the past decade plus, what we know now as peer networking evolved from an episodic and informal subset of gatherings to a prevalent, if not yet standard, practice at Casey. In many instances, we are the promoter. In others, a participant. And in some cases, both. While far from uniform in operation, these peer networks all reflect the common sense assumption that creating space and providing support for role-alikes to meet regularly around common issues and concerns would contribute to improved outcomes. And, it has.

This study was commissioned to test three suspicions - that peer networks work; that the ad hoc "let a thousand flowers bloom" approach yielded some good practices and some better practices; and that a more strategic approach to peer networking could yield additional value to the varied participants and to Casey. Through his patient listening and careful probing, Tom Backer helps to respond in the affirmative to all three.

"You're pulling back the curtain and revealing the process of how you've challenged an issue."
- an Annie E. Casey Foundation staffer, on why peer networking is powerful

Overview

In *The Foundation*, Joel Fleishman argues persuasively for the importance of "specific decision-making processes and progress-checking systems that foundations need to employ if they wish to increase the impact of their charitable money" (2007, p. xv). The strategy explored in this study is ***peer networking*** – a problem-solving and decision-making approach built on *interaction*, both structured and informal, among two or more people defined as "equals" by their similar goals and interests, job roles or place in a community.

Peers come together in networking activities to exchange information, disseminate good practices, and build leadership structure for work they do together, such as a community change initiative. Peer networking stimulates the transformative power of ideas, promoting conversation that helps reveal possibilities for change, and confirms the necessity of doing so.

The peer networking activities examined here are those of the Annie E. Casey Foundation, which has a central focus on community change and public systems reform to improve quality of life for vulnerable children and their families. Peer networking has helped Casey* undertake significant, sometimes transformational change, by increasing input from stakeholders in shaping its community and systems change initiatives. Some of these activities are involved directly with Casey's work in communities, some with national nonprofit or government leaders concerned with children and families, and some with foundation leaders having interests similar to Casey's.

Results from the study are organized into four major areas of learning:

• An approach to peer networking that emphasizes a balance between structure and informality – defined by Peters & Waterman (1982) as ***simultaneous loose-tight properties.***

• Ten ***good practices*** of peer networking that emerged from an analysis of 19 Casey peer networking activities.

• Ten ***challenges*** of peer networking identified in the analysis of Casey's 19 activities, providing a framework of cautions and limitations.

• An approach to understanding these challenges, most of which are ***unintended consequences*** of peer networking, and so not easy to disentangle from what makes it work.

Questions relevant to starting or improving a peer networking activity also emerged from the study, as did some recommendations for how peer networking at the Annie E. Casey Foundation can move to its next level of development for the Foundation as a whole. The study's larger frame is that of ***transformational change in foundations*** – how foundations re-shape their basic philanthropic strategy and their overall approaches to dealing with change, using activities like peer networking.

Examples of Peer Networking in Action

At each of about four meetings a year of the ***Urban Child Welfare Leaders Group*** (one of the 19 peer networking activities examined in this study), approximately 20 commissioners or directors (and their deputies) of child welfare agencies in big American cities come together to talk about the unique challenges they face. They discuss frankly

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* ***Note***: "Casey" as used throughout this report refers to the Annie E. Casey Foundation, one of the Casey family of philanthropic organizations.

the many challenges of running a complex child welfare system in an urban setting, and they listen to experts who talk about topics like older youth aging out of care, or court reform. The goal is to lift up specific problems a member wants the group's help to solve, but also to "move the field" towards systems change, including but not limited to changes the Annie E. Casey Foundation is promoting for vulnerable kids and families.

The first part of each meeting highlights knowledge on a topic of interest to the Group. For instance, the February 2006 meeting focused on how child welfare data can help with reform; researchers from Chapin Hall, Brookings Institution and other institutions helped organize the meeting. After the researchers or policy experts speak, they and any other invited guests leave, and just the Group members remain (along with Casey staff helping to coordinate the Group, one of whom is a former commissioner).

This peer network's history is entwined with that of the Annie E. Casey Foundation – while he was a senior associate with the Foundation, John Mattingly started the Group. Its first convening brought together leaders from the cities that were partners in Casey's Family to Family reform initiative. Now Mattingly is New York City's commissioner of child welfare, and an active Group member.

The Group members pay their own way (Casey covers hotel and meeting expenses), and they set their own agenda (with Casey staff providing operational support). One meeting a year is planned in collaboration with the Pew Commission on Child Welfare, and Pew helped fund a recent meeting on court reform, which included a strategic session on the regional level with court personnel and advocates. Another meeting was convened in collaboration with the National Center on State Courts, with judges invited from each "member city" (and the Group members were insistent that even the judges leave at a certain point so they could have their own time together, to talk about their own issues in private). The Group now is operated by the Annie E. Casey Foundation in collaboration with Casey Family Programs.

Though small, this peer network represents more than 50 percent of all "kids in care" in the United States. Thus it is in a position to have significant impact on how child welfare services are organized and delivered, and to offer leadership for many communities not actually represented at its meetings (the Group's history and activities also are described in Appendix B).

Making Connections is Casey's 10-year effort to improve the lives and prospects of families and children living in some of America's toughest neighborhoods. The 10-community initiative is based on the premise that children do well when their families are strong, and families do better when they live in supportive communities. From its inception, *Making Connections* has used peer networking approaches extensively to strengthen its community interventions through an overall learning agenda, following principles such as the importance of active participation of those doing the work on the ground, and providing ongoing capacity building as opposed to one-time, "drive-by TA."

Three peer networks illustrate the use of peer networking in this initiative:

- ***Making Connections Local Coordinators Network*** The members of this network are Casey consultants who work on the ground in each of the initiative's community sites.

- ***Making Connections Resident Leadership Network*** This network enhances the capacity of local residents at community sites to participate in Making Connections.

- ***Making Connections Social Network*** This network assists the Making Connections initiative in promoting healthy growth of social networks at community sites.

In addition, the ***TARC Peer Matching*** system brings together people from Making Connections sites for targeted, mutual exploration and problem solving.

Each of these peer networking activities is described in more detail later in this report. Making Connections also includes less structured peer networking for several other groups of people who support the community sites, such as the diarists who record the activities and process at each site, the site team leaders (Casey staff responsible for each site), Family Economic Success coaches and local learning partners. Some of these groups, like the diarists, meet regularly to talk about common issues; others, like the FES coaches, meet only when a specific topic needs discussion. Making Connections cross-site meetings, of which there are typically 5-8 a year, provide opportunities for these other contributors to the overall initiative to come together around a particular topic (e.g., workforce development).

From the beginnings of Making Connections in 2000, peer networking has been used to build coherence across the sites, to build esprit de corps, and to create a shared agenda and motivation to act. Peer networking also supports active co-design of this community initiative by residents and others "on the ground of change," along with Casey staff and consultants.

Such an approach is crucial in an area where there is not already a "well-worn path" to making change, and where there are many gifted people at a site whose input and support are needed. Unequal power relationships and cultural differences, often problematic in a change initiative created by a national funder, are also more readily addressable where this type of networking activity flourishes at the ground level. Peer networking helps all involved to deal more honestly with power differentials, build trust among people who are operating from different cultural assumptions, and create ongoing relationships to help with both communication and problem-solving.

The Making Connections peer networking activities (both formal and informal) collectively fall into four types:

• *Type A* - Peer networks that share general learnings and problem-solving approaches across sites through regular interactions, such as the Resident Leadership Network; the goals of these peer networks are, in priority order: learning/skill development, mobilization to take action, and motivational support.

• *Type B* - Peer networks that involve much smaller-scale attempts to get role-alike types together for more informal interactions; for example, the Family Economic Success coaches at each site used to meet occasionally in person, and have continued to meet by phone (their goals are, in priority order, learning/skill development, motivational support and mobilization for action).

• *Type C* - Peer networks that have a more straightforward professional development goal, such as the Local Coordinators Network (Casey's Leadership Development unit was a part of this effort).

• *Type D* - Peer matching, which brings together two or more sites for mutual exploration and problem solving, usually at one of the community sites, to enhance learning.

In some cases, these peer networking activities were very labor-intense and expensive in the early years of the initiative, but now have simpler goals and may involve fewer meetings or telephone rather than in-person interactions. At present, the Making Connections initiative is moving into its next phase with a deliberate transfer to local management, in order to promote sustainability of the community activities past the ten-year period of Casey's support. The peer networking activities just described will likely play a favorable role in this evolution.

Peer Networking and Transformational Change

This study emerged out of discussions in 2004 about how American foundations make major changes in philanthropic strategy. Change that goes beyond the procedural, to affect underlying philosophies as well as basic operations, is often called "transformational change." As is true in the business sector, there are many challenges to implementing this kind of significant change, and success is often elusive –– or at least a long time in coming. Much can be learned from looking at how transformational change is designed and carried out in various settings (examples from both the business and philanthropic sectors are described later).

These discussions evolved from a comparative analysis of transformational change in a number of foundations, to a focus on one element of major change that has been happening at the Annie E. Casey Foundation. For more than 10 years, Casey has increasingly used peer networking as a critical element in an overall re-shaping of its philanthropic strategy –– to implement community initiatives, to build community leadership for them, to help understand how well these interventions function, and to identify ways to improve them. As described in the next section, peer networking provides a platform for sharing ideas that can help to structure and guide a new initiative.

The transformational change that has resulted engages stakeholders more fully than was the case in some previous Casey initiatives, as set forth in *The Path of Most Resistance*, the Foundation's 1995 analysis of what it learned from that previous experience. Indeed, peer networking now plays a significant role in Casey's efforts to learn from its own activities, and to share what's learned with the field of philanthropy.

The underlying purpose is to promote continuous improvement of the Foundation's work in communities or with other funders, and especially to surface knowledge, skills and experiences that can help in that process. As one interviewee in this study put it, "our peer networks provide a way of capturing insight, of generating actionable knowledge."

Casey also is beginning to address questions driven by its commitment to knowledge management over the past five years: "What have we learned?" "How did we learn it?" "How can we share what we've learned?" The peer networking activities described here can help Casey as it responds to these questions through a knowledge management initiative the Foundation has implemented.

This study was guided by two underlying assumptions:

(1) Transformation is less likely to happen if change is introduced from the outside. Yet in the foundation world and elsewhere (as discussed later in the section that briefly reviews the literature on transformational change from the business sector), the tendency has been to look outside for innovation. It is difficult to transplant approaches from elsewhere into one's own environment, especially given all the unique circumstances that helped an approach succeed elsewhere.

The more relevant and useful place to look is inside. Within organizations and communities are the seeds of transformation. They include strong understanding of what has worked and how, and the commitment to change of staff, consultants and others based both on prior successes and coping with previous difficulties. The challenge is how to identify these resources and apply them in a new arena.

(2) Continuous improvement (a term used in the business sector) is not likely to happen as a solitary activity or in an organizational "silo." Organizations of all types do best when there is an open sharing of ideas (and feelings) across all

parts of the organization, and with relevant external stakeholders too. This open sharing helps sort out the torrent of irrelevant ideas from the relevant ones –– one of the key challenges of the Internet age.

It is that kind of goal-focused, moderately-structured sharing at which peer networking "shines."

Peer networking fosters patterns of human interaction that can lead to significant change. And in that process it also shapes organizational culture and builds leadership skills. Peer networking approaches also help build felt ownership and empowerment, especially among the disenfranchised populations that are key stakeholders in the philanthropic work of the Annie E. Casey Foundation.

However, it is also a resource-intensive process, and unless done right can fail to achieve much impact. It is to these "pros and cons" of peer networking for foundations in general, and Casey in particular, that this study is addressed.

Casey's History with Peer Networking

Peer networking came about through an informal evolution and over time became part of the culture at Casey. In fact, the term "peer networking" wasn't much used by those charged with developing most of the activities described here. The underlying notion is that "conversation matters": pulling people together for "learning, deciding, sharing, exploring and problem-solving" can make a difference in the success of the activities to which this input is supplied, as measured both by learning and by ultimate results.

One set of these activities is ***"Casey-Coordinated"***; that is, the peer networking is funded by Casey and managed by its staff and consultants (though often with co-design by network participants). The network's activities are focused on a particular foundation objective (bringing together community foundations, child welfare directors) or initiative (*Making Connections*). The multi-site *Making Connections* initiative has a number of peer networking activities, including three peer networks, the TARC Peer Matching system, and other less formal efforts.

A second set of peer networking activities involves Casey with other foundations that share a particular set of interests. In these ***"Externally-Coordinated"*** networks, the members are foundations, and although Casey may have had a role in starting up the network, it is also a "peer." Some of the value for Casey in belonging comes from the strength of all peer networks – the chance to interact with others who "look like you" and have similar responsibilities and challenges (in this case, other foundation leaders).

Whether labeled so or not, use of peer networking approaches emerged from Casey's system reform work beginning in the mid-1990's. This work reflected a major shift in the Foundation's overall philanthropic strategy, towards higher levels of community involvement in creating and running its initiatives. This shift is described in more detail in a case study presented in Anheier & Leat (2006).

In particular, setting up the initial structure of multi-site initiatives like the ten-year *Making Connections* program was shaped by many convenings. These "consultative sessions" brought together people from diverse backgrounds to offer candid input about how Casey could best work in community sites, and avoid approaches that had proved problematic in the past (such as the Foundation's difficulties with its New Futures program, well-documented in Casey's 1995 report *The Path of Most Resistance).*

The two-day sessions began with an evening reception that helped develop relationships among the diverse participants and Foundation staff. The next day's discussion began with an overview of the *Making Connections* core premises, principles and desired outcomes. Participant reactions were asked for on these and also on three key questions: "Are we headed in the right direction?" "Are we on the right track?" and "What's missing?" A major goal was to promote more inclusive decision-making about Casey's work, by getting legitimate stakeholders involved from all parts of the community (Backer, Smith & Barbell, 2005).

These approaches expanded as Casey developed a five-year plan and strategic framework, and obtained diverse input about them through "consultative sessions" involving nearly 600 stakeholders. The success of this approach led to the organizational philosophy that "conversation matters."

That philosophy helped encourage the development of peer networking activities by the Foundation, beginning with the Children and Family Fellows Alumni Network in 1992. Each activity arose partly out of a specific Casey objective, and in some cases its first meeting was mostly advisory to the Foundation, and may have borne some resemblance to a consultative session. The emphasis always was on meeting a larger objective by getting peers together and creating a network to support their interaction.

For example, the peer networking activities created as part of Casey's *Making Connections* initiative, already discussed, were framed in the larger context of the four-component framework used to create the initiative:

(1) looking within Casey at previous and current initiatives;

(2) holding consultative sessions with stakeholders (the beginnings of internal peer networking);

(3) reviewing similar initiatives of other foundations (sometimes leading to external peer networking); and

(4) undertaking design development based on these first three steps.

Making Connections has been implemented in community sites with a heavy reliance on technical assistance. Building on the success of peer networking strategies at the design stage, the TA process for implementation, and now for the creation of local operation and sustainability of the community sites, also is heavily peer-driven (the complexities of this process are beyond the scope of the present study, and will not be further discussed here). As already discussed, the success of peer networking in the *Making Connections* initiative has helped to promote wider application within the Foundation.

The success of one of Casey's other peer networking activities, the Children & Family Fellows Alumni Network, gave it a high profile in the Foundation, also encouraging wider use of peer networking approaches at Casey. Today peer networking is or has been part of much of Casey's work in communities, and with its own peers in philanthropy.

Collectively, these peer networking efforts have required a considerable investment of time and financial resources by the Foundation. Evidence from at least two evaluations Casey commissioned, plus some qualitative data gathered both internally from Foundation staff and from communities, all suggest that peer networking has had positive impact.

But outside of the particular programmatic areas in which they have operated, peer networking as a concept has been a kind of "stealth" strategy change at Casey, with the two major exceptions just noted. By all reports, these activities appear to be well-regarded and to have had some real impact. As individual enterprises, they were created and implemented quite intentionally by those directly involved with them.

However, they have operated *collectively* somewhat under the radar of the Foundation's overall philanthropic strategy. Many of these activities have been little documented or discussed across Casey as an organization. Even fewer have been presented in publications or convenings that share how the strategies have worked with other grantmakers or the nonprofit sector. So far, only two of the 19 activities reported here have been evaluated systematically (the Children and Family Fellowship Alumni Network and the TARC Peer Matching system).

In the interviews conducted for this study, internal interviewees often did not know about Casey's peer networking activities beyond the ones with which they had personal experience. External interviewees, though typically knowledgeable about Casey's overall work, often did not know anything about the Foundation's peer networking efforts. In fact, many external interviewees said they thought about peer networking among foundations in terms of traditional affinity groups of the Council on Foundations, and their meetings either independently or at Council conferences, which fit few of the parameters of peer networking as defined here.

Casey is now at a moment when it is possible to move from an informal, but prevalent practice into something more intentional and systemic in nature. The study reported here can support the Foundation's effort to make peer networking a more integrated and intentional part of its philanthropic strategy, and to establish clearer linkages between what these activities are doing and Casey's larger goals, which provide the rationale for such peer networking to be undertaken.

The Foundation also is exploring the relevance of related concepts such as Communities of Practice (Wenger & Snyder, 2000). Both peer networking and Communities of Practice approaches were discussed at a July 2006 Casey Management Committee Meeting, including presentation of preliminary findings from this study (similarities between these two approaches are discussed further below).

Defining Peer Networking

As already defined here, *peer networking* is a problem-solving and decision-making approach built on *interaction*, both structured and informal, among two or more people defined as "equals" by their common goals or interests, similar job roles or place in a community. Peer networking involves these people exchanging information, disseminating good practices and building leadership skills, to achieve some commonly-valued purpose, such as community change.

What makes peer networking different than being on an advisory committee or other traditional ways of promoting community involvement and decision-making? As the term "peer" itself denotes, there is a heavy emphasis on equality, and as Casey has implemented these activities, on inclusive decision-making that is intended to foster ownership of community initiatives, and on development of leadership for change through a more intensive, problem-solving approach.

From the sponsor's perspective, peer networking can provide a continuous form of scanning the environment. Peer networking activities can help a foundation like Casey look beyond its usual sources for new work, fresh ideas, and innovative organizations. It also can provide input to the shaping of a particular initiative (Grantcraft, 2006).

Peer networking takes two major forms. The first type involves establishing a ***peer network*** which brings together people with common interests as just defined.

The peer network can be quite informal, interacting occasionally by phone or e-mail. Or it can be well-structured, planning and holding meetings, fostering collaboration among group members, and engaging in other activities that may involve pooling of resources. Eighteen of the 19 activities studied here are peer networks.

The second type of peer networking involves a ***peer match*** between two individuals or groups, so one can learn about activities of the other (often the process is reciprocal as well). Sometimes peer matching includes a site visit by one or more leaders of an organization or community to the location of a successful change effort, so that replication or problem-solving can be based in part on direct observation. Only one peer matching effort was studied here, but it involves a large, well-developed system whose activities have many important implications for effective peer networking, and which has had considerable validation of its impact.

These are not new concepts. The Center for the Study of Social Policy and the EZ/EC Foundation Consortium (2001) see peer networks and peer matches as two of five forms of *peer assistance*, which also includes professional development programs, learning circles and peer-developed learning products. Bringing together peers in a networking process also is a sub-category of the broader realm of social networking, the impact of which has broad support from research in the social and behavioral sciences (Rogers, 2003).

Much knowledge about social networks comes from the community and economic development field, based on both domestic and international experience (e.g., Krebs & Holley, 2002). Concepts and practices of social networks were reviewed by Bailey (2005, 2004), in papers written for the *Making Connections* Social Network, one of the 19 Casey peer networking activities studied here. Although it is not the purpose of this study to review the knowledge and practice base on social networks, this intellectual material is a part of the platform for the work reported here.

Just to give one major example, Rogers (2003), in his seminal book on diffusion of innovations, notes that networking can have significant impact on the overall processes of innovation and change, and he cites a wealth of supporting research on this subject. For instance, Rogers focuses on the "weak ties" in social networks (connections between people who are not in the same environment and didn't already know each other) that have power because they bring people into contact who are not from the same background or setting, and thus each tend to know about new and different things. Plastrik & Taylor (2006) call social networks "systems of social ties that link people to one another." They examine some of the key strengths of social networks (like resilience and adaptive capacity), the key decisions involved in organizing a network, and the tasks of managing its development. Their paradigm describes well the peer networking activities studied here.

They include an analysis of what happens when funders organize networks, as the Annie E. Casey Foundation did for the peer networks examined in this study. While acknowledging the value of a foundation (or other funder such as a government agency or a university) and its financial or other assets in creating networks, Plastrik & Taylor identify three dangers:

(1) the funder may *overestimate the power of its value proposition* to attract others to a network (in plain English, people or organizations may join the network because they want access to the foundation's money, not because they believe in the cause the foundation is espousing or the way they're going about achieving it through a network – and the foundation's support for peer networking may drive out consideration of other approaches that might work better for a particular purpose – this danger also was identified by interviewees for the present study);

(2) the funder may *skip necessary steps in network building* (especially those related to healthy alignment of goals and values, and healthy connectivity based in trust); or

(3) the funder may *hold on to the network's reins too tightly,* making it more difficult for peers to feel ownership and remain invested in the network over time.

These all are important cautions in understanding the value and impact of the peer networking activities studied here. As will be seen in the analysis following, Casey seems to have done a good job of avoiding the second and third dangers. The first is more problematic, since it often is not easy to get networking participants to be open about their motivations for joining.

Peer networking as a specific activity also is the subject of research and writing, summarized in works such as Rhodes, Stokes and Hampton (2004). By the 1970's, peer networking strategies already were being used in fields like vocational rehabilitation (Backer, 1985). An early example similar to the peer matching activities studied here is the "visiting project consultant project," in which directors of a local rehabilitation project were sent off to a site in another region, to provide TA on how to implement the model in a new setting (Butler, 1975).

Peer networking also has value in dealing with the complex situations most foundations encounter when working with communities on issues of change – there is a huge volume of information that must be sorted through, and a great deal of uncertainty associated with taking action. In the words of national security expert Gregory Treventon, these are problems that take the form of a "mystery," rather than a "puzzle," which has a clearly-defined solution (Gladwell, 2007). Peer networking has many natural advantages in taking action on community problems that constitute a "mystery," such as how to change complex health behaviors, how to reduce community poverty, etc.

In *Help on the Way*, advantages of technical assistance provided through peer networking were identified. They are repeated here as another "viewing lens" for evaluating the impact of these activities (Center for the Study of Social Policy, 2005):

• It capitalizes on the strengths of communities, helping people to develop options for action rather than looking for problems to fix (this process in turn supports community empowerment and the development of leadership skills by residents, who then will carry on the work of change once the outside intervener, Casey in this instance, has departed).

• It fits the way adults learn (as set forth in Malcolm Knowles' adult learning theory, which assumes that adults learn best when they are involved in diagnosing, planning, implementing and evaluating their own learning – with readiness increased by the perceived relevance of learning to task performance).

• It helps build new knowledge for the field about problem-solving approaches for dealing with complex issues like poverty reduction, or increasing the quality of services for vulnerable children and their families.

• It extends resources available to communities for creating change strategies and implementing them beyond those of professional consultants.

• It increases racial, ethnic and cultural diversity of the sources of assistance for the work of change – especially important in the disadvantaged communities where Casey focuses its work, which tend to be diverse across all these lines.

Finally, peer networking activities include as a major component opportunities for *peer learning*, a topic widely explored in education and management sciences. One recent definition from the nonprofit sector is "the convening of individuals at similar stages of development to exchange knowledge in an effort to mutually enhance skills and capabilities" (Community Partners, 2006).

Thus, peer learning involves more than social networking. It reflects the larger processes of adult learning because it is a problem-centered activity organized around the learners' social roles – qualities defined by the adult learning theories of Malcolm Knowles (1990), as already mentioned.

The extensive literature on this topic will not be reviewed here, but two concepts emerge from the peer learning work of the Aspen Institute's Rural Development Philanthropy Learning Network that will be applied in analyzing the 19 Casey peer networking activities. Aspen's ten-year project brought together staff of community foundations to increase the ability of their institutions to improve community and economic development for poor people in rural areas.

In this networking activity, peer learning sessions were created by the participants in a process of ***active design.*** This began by Aspen staff interviewing the participants to identify themes, instructive stories and "dirty laundry" that could contribute to the development of a learning agenda, and then working actively with participants to design that agenda and to implement it (this co-design strategy also is seen in many of the Casey peer networking activities, particularly those associated with *Making Connections*).

And the focus of the agenda was on what participants actually could do to effect changes based on the peer learning experience, in a process of ***active learning*** (following the principles of adult learning theory, as already mentioned). This two-prong approach of "networking leading to learning" now is being used in Casey's Strengthening Rural Families Initiative.

Study Data Sources, Analysis and Limitations

Sources The study began with a literature review, involving internal documents supplied by Casey, literature in philanthropy, and literature from management sciences, as well as publications on peer-to-peer networks in computer technology and on the human process of peer networking (plus social networking, peer learning and adult learning). Casey documents describing some, but not all, of the 19 peer networking activities were part of the literature review, as were reports on the two evaluations that have been conducted of the Children and Family Fellows Alumni Network and the TARC Peer Matching system.

The heart of the study was a set of 21 interviews with Casey senior staff (plus several long-time Casey consultants and staff members from the Center for the Study of Social Policy, which operates major programs for Casey) and 42 interviews with thought leaders from a variety of perspectives. Appendix A presents the complete list of interviewees, conducted between March 2005 and March 2007.

Analysis A clinical content analysis was done by the author to identify major themes, good practices and challenges related to peer networking. Good practices and challenges were validated by specific examples as well as observations from interviewees and the literature review. Two lists of questions and a set of recommendations for enhancing Casey's peer networking activities also emerged from this content analysis. In addition, summary descriptions of each peer networking activity were prepared, along with a chart compressing basic data about the 19 activities into a one-page overview.

Limitations Since as noted later this was an exploratory, qualitative study and not an empirical evaluation, all of the findings presented here are tentative, and meant to inspire further discussion and debate. They have been validated informally by providing a copy of the draft report for review by all those interviewed; a number of corrections and expansions of the study results emerged from this review. Nonetheless, the primary conclusions of the study are the author's, based upon clinical analysis. Suggestions are made later for how these preliminary findings could be further validated and extended.

Also, the data analysis did not attempt to sort out the impact of differences in the purpose, nature and specific functions of the 19 peer networking activities studied. These differences include not only the several categories identified (Casey Coordinated vs. Externally- Coordinated, etc.), but others that were not studied comparatively – in the level of resources committed to an activity, the field in which it was operating (e.g., child welfare directors, foundation chief program executives, and so forth), or the methods used for networking (in-person meetings, telephone calls, etc.). The value of this exploratory study is primarily in the descriptions it provides, along with speculations about what works and what doesn't in peer networkings, for future study and discussion.

Study Learnings

Four areas of learning were derived from these interviews and the initial document analysis. In addition, a set of key questions was framed for those contemplating the start-up or improvement of a peer network or peer matching system. The 19 peer networking activities are described briefly in the body of this report, and analyzed in more detail in Appendix B. Results from interviews with thought leaders in philanthropy and the literature review are framed under discussions of transformational change and peer networking both for foundations and for the private sector. Finally, six suggestions are made for how the Annie E. Casey Foundation might "move to the next level" in integrating peer networking with its overall philanthropic strategy.

The study's four main learnings are organized into four sections, each discussed further below:

• ***An overall approach to peer networking that emphasizes a balance between structure and informality – defined by Peters & Waterman (1987) as simultaneous loose-tight properties.***

An organizing principle that underlies all of the good practices revealed by this research is that effective peer networking approaches are complex, and operate best when organized with a blend of structure and informality. That's what Peters & Waterman (1987), in their groundbreaking book on the characteristics of high-performing American companies, called "simultaneous loose-tight properties." These elements co-exist in a dynamic balance where *both* contribute to organizational effectiveness, and indeed that also appears to be the case for the 19 peer networking activities studied here.

For example, the Children and Family Fellows Alumni Network has an annual meeting, professional development activities, a small grants program and a Network Coordinator – all elements of a well-developed professional structure. However, it also encourages informal interactions among alumni on both their personal and professional agendas, and has included many individual actions undertaken by Fellows.

Thus, several Alumni Network Fellows traveled considerable distances to visit and support another Fellow who had been hospitalized. All of the peer networking activities studied here have developed some variation of this structure-informality balance; in some cases, that balance has shifted over time as the activity itself evolved.

This balance between structure and informality can be difficult to maintain. As one interviewee put it, "There is sometimes a knowing-doing gap. We're good at talking about problems but not so good at going back and dealing with them." Facilitation of a peer networking effort must permit spontaneous interaction, but also provide the structure for rigorous application ... and for rigorous definition of what knowledge and strategies are there to be used.

• ***Ten good practices of peer networking that emerged from an analysis of 19 Casey peer networking activities.***

The list below states what these good practices are, followed by an examination of each one.

PEER NETWORKING AT THE ANNIE E. CASEY FOUNDATION - GOOD PRACTICES AND CHALLENGES

Ten good practices of peer networking:

- Provide a safe, trustful place for participants to interact on topics important to them
- Encourage personal as well as professional interactions among participants
- Customize the peer networking structure to meet specific participant needs
- Promote opportunities for participants and their organizations to collaborate
- Encourage participant feedback about the strengths and challenges of peer networking
- Build the activity's initial success before broadening its range of participants
- Offer resources for participants to translate ideas into action
- Create sub-groups within the peer networking activity to focus on particular topics of interest
- Shape the activity by analyzing the successes of other peer networking activities
- Level the playing field by sharing basic information about the focal area of peer networking

Ten challenges of peer networking:

- Peer networking is costly in both time and money
- Participants in peer networking may find it difficult to take action on good ideas they've developed
- The goals of peer networking may be difficult to identify and to share with others
- Peer networking may be difficult to integrate with other activities of its sponsor
- It may be challenging to balance equality with expertise in selecting peer networking participants
- Organizational complexity and culture of a peer networking sponsor may limit chances for success
- It may be challenging to develop a good exit strategy for a peer networking activity
- Replicating peer networking activities may be difficult
- Participant turnover may limit the success of peer networking
- Individual and group psychological factors may limit the success of peer networking

KEY QUESTIONS FOR CREATING OR ENHANCING PEER NETWORKING ACTIVITIES

Based on what was learned from this study, following are two sets of questions that may be asked either when a new peer networking activity is being created and implemented, or when an existing peer network or peer matching system is being evaluated for possible improvements:

Key questions for creating or enhancing peer networks:

- Who comes to the table as a peer? (e.g., are peers at the right levels in their organizations/communities?)
- Who facilitates the peer network? (e.g., the funder or a third-party?)
- What process and structure are needed for peer network meetings?
- What can be done to facilitate additional networking outside of peer network meetings?
- What resources are needed to operate the peer network?
- What policy needs to be developed for peer communications, both inside and outside?
- What relationships can be established with other peer networking activities?
- What measures of success are possible, and how can these be used to improve the peer network activity?
- What relationship does the peer network have to other organizational or community activities?
- What kind of exit strategy is needed and how will network members know when to implement it?

Key questions for creating or enhancing peer matching systems:

- What are the specific purposes of the peer matching? (what is needed, not just what is wanted)
- Who needs to be present from both sides of the match?
- How will each side benefit from participating?
- Who facilitates the peer matching?
- What resources are needed for peer matching?
- What measures of success are possible, and how can these be used to improve the activity?
- What relationship does the peer match have to other organizational or community activities?
- What kinds of follow-up are needed?

• ***Ten challenges of peer networking identified in the analysis of Casey's 19 activities, providing a framework of cautions and limitations.***

The same one-page list (above) presenting the good practices that emerged from this study also identifies challenges of peer networking, which also are discussed later in more detail.

• ***An overall approach to understanding these challenges, most of which are unintended consequences of peer networking, and so not easy to disentangle from what makes it work.***

In medicine, it is a truism that all drugs having a powerful main effect also have significant side effects. Though these can be managed and minimized, the bottom line is that to get the drug's benefit the side effects have to be tolerated. This turns out to be true more broadly, as set forth in Edward Tenner's book, *Why Things Bite Back: The Revenge of Unintended Consequences*.

Most of the challenges identified here are to some extent natural by-products of the way in which peer networking is used in communities (including the philanthropic community), and should be thought of as non-pathological problems to be solved, or at least handled. They can't be readily eliminated without altering what the energies and communication opportunities that help make peer networking effective.

It is possible, of course, that in some instances the costs or side effects of peer networking are so substantial that it would be better not to develop the activity in the first place. Peer networks and peer matches are not the right solutions to all problems in all settings, and a healthy process for exploring such activities includes asking the difficult question about unintended consequences.

Other Learnings Study results also shaped a list of *key questions* (presented above) implementers can ask if they are putting together a peer network or peer matching system (or enhancing one that is already in operation). Taken together, the good practices and key questions lists can be used as "action checklists" when designing and implementing a peer networking activity, or evaluating a currently-operating one to see how it might be improved. The list of challenges can also be used prospectively to help develop a peer networking effort that pays attention to these cautions, or retrospectively as part of evaluation.

Finally, the study led to some *recommendations* for how the Annie E. Casey Foundation might take peer networking to the next level of development as a central part of its philanthropic strategy. As mentioned, this approach has been widely used within the Foundation for some years now, but mostly "below the radar screen." The recommendations provide a "road map" for how the Foundation might learn more about its peer networking efforts, develop a more intentional policy about them, and integrate this activity more fully into their overall philanthropic strategy.

Audiences for Study Results

The main target audiences for the learnings derived from this two-year study are:

• Casey staff, for their use in continuously improving the peer networking activities for which they have responsibility, and in starting new ones – and to encourage peer networking within the Foundation about the peer network process itself;

• Casey grantees and communities, particularly at the *Making Connections* sites (including Casey consultants in those communities); and

• the field of philanthropy and the larger nonprofit sector, through this report and possible wider dissemination of its findings, e.g., through Casey's Knowledge Management system, as recommended in the report's concluding section.

The report also recommends ways learnings can be disseminated and used by these audiences.

Next Steps in Evaluating the Impact of Peer Networking

Woven into all these learnings are some observations about the impact of peer networking activities Casey has undertaken the last 15 years. As mentioned, this study was not an evaluation, so no effort was made to document outcomes, and in fact most of these peer networking activities have not been evaluated by anyone (with two exceptions, as noted and described further below).

However, the evaluation of peer networking activities to determine their impact – the results achieved set against costs and side effects – is critical if this approach is to be used more strategically at Casey, and recommended for use by other foundations or communities. Intuitively the concept of peer networking is persuasive, but there actually is only modest evidence from the works reviewed for this study that it is impactful and cost-effective.

The frameworks presented here for understanding and categorizing peer networking approaches also could be used to help establish criteria for evaluation (how to do this is set forth in one of the recommendations for Casey's possible future efforts, as discussed below). More rigorous evaluation work needs to be done, which will require gathering of new evidence about the impact of peer networking activities at Casey. However, gathering together information that already exists about the range of Casey's peer networking activities would be a good first step, a process begun by this study. The recommendations section of this report lays out how this might be done.

Defining Casey's Peer Networking Activities

Following are brief definitions of the 18 peer networks and one peer matching system that were examined in this study. They are organized into two categories, as already mentioned: the Casey-Coordinated peer networking activities are those where Casey is the only funder of the activity, and has an internal leadership role in all aspects of the peer networking effort (even for those cases, such as the TARC Peer Matching effort, where the actual activity is conducted by an outside third party on contract to Casey). For the Externally-Coordinated peer networks, Casey may have started and/or be a primary supporter of the activity, but these are all networks of funders where Casey is just one member.

Appendix B presents more detailed information about each of these 19 networking activities, including a summary chart comparing some of their significant characteristics (whether participants were involved in their design, what types of active learning approaches were used, the network's life span, and some of its key activities and products).

The 19 peer networking activities studied here, in alphabetical order, are:

Casey-Coordinated Peer Networking Activities

• ***Child Welfare Training Directors Group*** This peer network focused on the role of staff training and development in systems reform for child welfare agencies across the country, and on best practice approaches to staff training and development in these systems.

• ***Children and Family Fellows Alumni Network*** The Alumni Network brings together people who have held Casey Child and Family Fellowships.

• ***Community Foundation Exchange*** This network of community foundations held multiple meetings over a two-year period, organized around the question: "What does it take to be an effective community foundation, especially around advancing outcomes for vulnerable children and families?"

• ***Family Strengthening Awards*** This network is run as a joint venture with a dozen national nonprofits. Each uses their contacts to identify potential recipients of an award for promoting community-based approaches to family strengthening. Network meetings both supervise the awards and offer chances for members to share and problem-solve on more general issues.

• ***Language Access Network*** This network is focused on learning what would help limited English-proficient children and families have better access to high quality services, and on the specific challenge of reducing the number of children who serve as translators for their parents.

• ***Leadership in Action Program*** This is a network composed of representatives from *Making Connections* community sites (and sites of other Casey programs), and is oriented to helping communities and their leaders implement results-based leadership development programming.

• ***Making Connections Local Coordinators Network*** The local coordinators in this network are Casey consultants who work with the *Making Connections* sites on the ground.

• ***Making Connections Resident Leadership Network*** This network enhances the capacity of local residents at the *Making Connections* sites (plus the Atlanta civic site) to participate in this community change effort, with problem-solving and leadership development opportunities.

• ***Making Connections Social Network*** This network on social networks assists the *Making Connections* initiative in promoting healthy growth of social networks at its community sites.

• ***National Partners Network*** This network consists of the CEOs of 11 national nonprofit organizations. They meet to focus on promoting wider use of family strengthening approaches.

• ***TARC Peer Matching*** This peer matching system offers structured opportunities for teams of people in two or more communities working on similar issues to exchange experiences and practical knowledge. Their interaction is focused on challenges that have been identified in advance.

• ***United Way Training Program*** This network is focused on an executive education program developed to get family strengthening approaches more broadly understood and adopted among United Ways across the country.

• ***Urban Child Welfare Leaders Group*** This peer network pulls together commissioners or directors of child welfare large urban systems, to explore best practices and challenges in their respective environments.

Externally-Coordinated Peer Networking Activities

• ***Casey/CSSP Alliance for Race Equity in Child Welfare*** This peer network is focused on race equity in child welfare systems, and its members include the Center for the Study of Social Policy, four Casey philanthropies, and several other members.

• ***Lead Program Executives Group*** Composed of foundation executive vice-presidents (or equivalent job titles), including those from some of America's largest foundations, this network explores unique leadership and operational issues these "chief program officers" face in their jobs.

• ***Leadership Development Funder Affinity Network*** This network brings together leaders of about 30 foundations having a funding interest in leadership development.

• ***Long-Term Funders Exchange*** This network's members are funders of long-term community change initiatives. They meet to discuss the special challenges of creating, operating and evaluating such initiatives.

• ***National Rural Funders Collaborative*** This network consists of CEOs and program officers from 12 national and regional foundations with funding interests in rural communities.

• ***PRI Makers Network*** This network brings together funders interested in making Program Related Investments, to share best practices and coordinate their activities.

There are other Casey peer networking activities not studied in this research. For example, Casey has for several years been coordinating an Embedded Funders Group. This peer network consists of foundations that, like Casey, have made long-term funding commitments to one or more specific geographical areas (a city or a neighborhood within it), and have attempted to work closely (become "embedded") in the life of these communities as part of their philanthropic strategy.

At a November 2006 meeting of this peer network, participants decided they would like to continue some activity even though the formal sponsorship by Casey is coming to an end. The description of *Making Connections* earlier in this report also mentions several peer networking activities within that initiative that are not further analyzed here.

More on Good Practices and Challenges of Peer Networking

Good Practices This study identified ten "good practice" approaches to creating and operating peer networking activities that appeared in some or all of the 19 activities studied here, and that may be relevant to shaping other peer networking efforts (examples are given of each):

• ***Provide a safe, trustful place for participants to interact*** Peer networking participants need a safe place to talk about their work off-the-record with trusted, experienced equals. This was identified as the most important benefit of membership in a peer network by many interviewees. As one interviewee stated, "Everybody is running, and this is a chance to be peaceful and reflective with colleagues who are knowledgeable and share similar experiences."

As another way of expressing it, one interviewee said: "The main benefit of peer networking is the comfort and enjoyment of talking with people who really know what you mean when you pose a problem or a possible solution, but who don't work with you day by day and thus don't have the same mindset. We've found the deep understanding of the problem to be in common, but we didn't start from the same mindset or premises or experiences, so there was a fresh perspective, perhaps tilted 15 degrees either way."

This is particularly important for Casey because the Foundation is oriented to risk-taking. One interviewee referred to Casey as a "faith-based organization" because it has taken major risks by moving in directions that have not yet been validated by a lot of research or prior experience, either at the Foundation or elsewhere in philanthropy. Where such risk-taking is involved, having a "trustful space" where fears and concerns about the commitment to change, and pros and cons of certain approaches, can be talked about candidly is essential.

Trust in peer matching systems is generated in part because the technical assistance typically is two-way, reinforcing that the exchange is among peers. TARC Peer Matching devotes great attention to figuring out who from each community ought to be included to maximize the chances for a good exchange and also for use of what's learned in taking later action.

Examples: The Leadership Development Funders Affinity Group has funders-only meetings, not affiliated with the Council on Foundations or other philanthropic associations, where "deep and candid conversations" happen in a "safe place for reflective practice"; the Urban Child Welfare Leaders Group has similar child welfare directors-only meetings. In the words of one interviewee, members seem to feel that this is "the one place I could go where I felt I was truly among peers, and could have a safe place to talk about the challenges of running a complex child welfare system in an urban setting."

Other peer network participants spoke in similar terms. For example, the youth development organizations in the Family Strengthening Awards network compete with each other in other arenas, but the network offers a "non-compete" environment in which they can learn from each other.

Observers of the Long Term Funders Exchange talked about the "comfort level" inherent in a discussion forum where all the others at the table are not only funders, but also funders that have made enduring commitments to funding at multiple community sites. Similar comments were made about almost all of the peer networking activities examined in this study.

• ***Encourage personal as well as professional interactions among participants*** Peer networking encourages relationships that cross boundaries of organizational or system learning agendas, offering both emotional and personal problem-solving support. These personal relationships provide incentives for participation in peer networking activities, just as do the professional learning and systems-oriented connections.

Examples: The Children & Family Fellows Alumni Network encourages spontaneously-offered support from one member to another, ranging from personalized executive coaching, to support through a personal crisis such as a health issue. Participants are motivated to do this because of "deep attachments to one another" that were built over time, during both the structured and unstructured aspects of the Network's operations, according to a study interviewee.

Several of the Making Connections peer networks include meetings conducted informally over meals, which encourages more personal sharing of problems and informal advice about their resolution. Lead Program Executive and Urban Child Welfare Leaders Group network members also report informal telephone conversations between meetings that have the same value. Whether dining, telephoning or e-mailing, the bulk of non-meeting connections reported for these peer networks tended to have a more informal and personal element, sometimes addressing sensitive emotional issues like dealing with a crisis at work, succession planning, and so forth.

This more personal approach has even extended to the conclusion of a network's activity. When the Child Welfare Training Directors Group concluded in 2006, its last event was a dinner that celebrated the group's achievements, recognized individual members with a certificate, and provided a healthy environment for sharing both the successes of the group and some sadness over its end.

• ***Customize the peer networking structure to meet specific participant needs*** Peer networking requires an ongoing investment of time and resources to develop activity customized to the initiative it is supporting; it is not "one-size-fits-all." As one interviewee stated: "There is no magic in bringing people together, but rather in what they do when they are together. Convening people for anything less intense, or with less up-front planning, is not worth doing. It matters how you create the space and how you set the expectations."

Examples: The Community Foundation Exchange made a major investment in bringing together community foundations to focus on building their effectiveness in their communities, and active sharing with like-minded peers. In addition to significant travel expenses for convening a large group of community foundation staff, major resources were invested in structuring the networking activities to reach certain goals of the Exchange, facilitated by both the Coalition of Community Foundations for Youth and Chapin Hall.

The results included specific actions such as the Milwaukee Foundation refocusing their engagement with the community around Family Economic Strengthening, acting as a catalyst to bring together community leaders on this topic; and the Des Moines Community Foundation becoming a leader in convening other philanthropic organizations in the region around supporting improved services for vulnerable children and families. The customizing process also identified some approaches that didn't work – for instance, the Exchange's meetings included some speakers who simply didn't know enough about community foundations and the challenges they face to be effective, so the meeting organizers began to look more for speakers with "ideas that connect to the real world rather than big names," in the words of one interviewee.

Similarly, the multiple *Making Connections* peer networks were re-shaped over time not only to reflect learnings about how the networking process works best, but also to accommodate evolving needs. For example, as the thrust of the initiative shifted over the last several years from implementation to sustainability (and the transfer of operations to a community-based organization at each site), the local coordinators realized they needed to reduce their time investment in planning and participating in network meetings, so they asked to meet as a network only when they already were convening for some other purpose.

• ***Promote opportunities for participants and their organizations to collaborate*** Collaborations increase the chances for wide impact of an initiative, and both informal and formal activities of peer networking provide chances for participants to get to know each other and to identify areas in which collaborations would be of mutual benefit ... without making a commitment until there is reason to believe that a collaboration would be effective! In the words of one interviewee, "you listen for someone whose mission and vision matches your own, and then go forge a working relationship."

Examples: Leadership Development Funders Affinity Group members are encouraged, both through the meetings of this peer network, and through contacts outside the more formal interactions, to approach other members about possible collaborations. Collaborative opportunities are more likely to emerge among the 15 or so members of this group who come all the time to its meetings. There are about another 15-20 who come sporadically, and building the deeper relationships of ongoing partnering is more challenging for them.

Some networks exist in part to take collaborative action, such as the Language Access Network, Family Strengthening Awards and National Partners Network. They are brought together by a common agenda, and look systematically during each network meeting at how they can work together to make progress on that agenda.

In many other peer networks, informal collaborations happen on a regular basis, often as an outgrowth of opportunities identified at group meetings. This is particularly true for the six externally-coordinated funder networks studied here. As already mentioned, the network meetings provide a safe space for funders to interact, and that also encourages the identification of collaborative prospects. In some cases, as with the Lead Program Executives Group (but true to considerable extent of all these networks), part of the value of the meetings is that it brings together extraordinarily busy people who may find it difficult to schedule time to talk with each other.

• ***Encourage participant feedback about peer networking*** Peer networking activities can yield informal but very useful feedback for improvement of an initiative that is complementary to more formal evaluation. This feedback offers a platform for discussing and taking action on evaluation findings.

Examples: The Children & Family Fellows Alumni Network has developed several informal feedback channels that supplement what was learned from a more formal outside evaluation study conducted by the OMG Center. They have participated in writing some stories about how the Fellows have been impacted by their participation in this peer network, which have become part of the larger process to document lessons learned from this group, e.g., through a series of newsletters written by an outside consultant. They also allow time in the network's meetings to talk about what they're learning and about how to improve its operations.

While these multiple feedback channels are expensive, they also have provided a wealth of documentation about what the Alumni Network is doing and what kind of impact it is having. Such documentation is quite likely a factor in the positive reputation it has developed within Casey, as a kind of "shining example" of what's possible through good peer networking.

Similarly, feedback loops have been established for each of the *Making Connections* peer networks. In the case of the TARC Peer Matching system, feedback channels involve data gathered by an outside evaluator, Community Development Associates, including a report of 100 percent satisfaction with the peer matching process by those who participated in a round of these activities.

Most other peer networks encourage feedback informally at group meetings. This allows for continuous improvement of the networking process over time.

• ***Build the activity's initial success before broadening its range of participants*** A certain level of success in peer networking is needed before bringing in additional peers, especially those at a higher level of authority in the community.

Examples: The *Making Connections* Resident Leadership Network brought in mayors and United Way directors to peer networking meetings after the group was well-established and had actually accomplished some things in the community – they could then point to these achievements of the group when engaging these local leaders. Moreover, this made it easier to get major institutions like United Way involved, but not lose individual resident voices.

In other networks, both some expansion of the group and its very continuation were supported because there was an appraisal (usually informal, at network meetings) of the network's success after a certain period of operation. And when experiences suggest that an expansion may not be in the best interest of the group, as happened with an effort to grow the number of participants in the Lead Program Executives network, the group process can then support making the hard decision *not* to grow.

• ***Offer resources for participants to translate ideas into action*** Peer networking benefits from having resources available to participants that support translating ideas into action. Resources may be needed to support specific activities or experiences that can help meet the network's defined learning agenda, or they may be required to undertake projects that emerge out of either the deliberations of the entire group or the ideas of a particular member.

Examples: The Child and Family Fellowship Alumni Network has a small grant program to which alumni can apply in order to fund projects of their choosing. All applications are reviewed and selected by a committee of alumni peers.

Many other Casey networks make resources available to translate ideas into action that reflect the group's learning agenda, either related to the overall group objective or particular issues the network identifies as needing further exploration. The Urban Child Welfare Leaders Group, for instance, brings in experts to make presentations at network meetings, as do many of the other networks. Experiential exercises or other skill development activities may also require an investment of resources.

• ***Create sub-groups within the peer networking activity to focus on particular topics of interest*** Peer networks often form sub-groups to focus on specific issues, thus keeping the networking activity practical and close to the ground.

Examples: The *Making Connections* Local Coordinators Network convenes subgroups at its regular meetings to permit more focused attention on topics like workforce preparation. Sometimes these subgroup meetings are conducted informally over a meal. Several other networks regularly create informal subgroups to consider topics that may not be of equal interest to the entire network.

• ***Shape the activity by analyzing the successes of other peer networking activities*** Peer networking can be enhanced by examining other successful peer networks or peer matching systems, to see how they operate and what results they've achieved.

Examples: The Social Network has looked at intermediaries, like the Oakland Family Independence Institute, all of which are successful at networking. Each of the intermediaries was site visited, providing input that could be used to develop a framework for social network building that Casey can use in *Making Connections*, identifying the essential elements that make for robustness and ability to tie networking activities with an overall community change mission.

To the extent that Casey's peer networking activities – especially those from early efforts such as the Children and Family Fellows Alumni Network and the *Making Connections* networks – are visible to organizers of newer networks, there also has been successful use of strategies and principles advanced by these "pioneering efforts." This also has been true within the *Making Connections* initiative, as it has created additional peer networks over the life of the initiative.

• ***Level the playing field by sharing basic information about the focal area of peer networking*** Especially when the strategy or community or systems change initiative on which peer networking is focused isn't well known to participants, basic education about it is essential at the beginning.

Examples: All peer networks have an informational component. They exist in part to share knowledge about the topical area of the network, and one of the attractions for participation is that group members will have access to state-of-the-art knowledge in an area of great interest, presented in a context where there is validation of that knowledge by other members of the network. Some networks, such as the Language Access Network and the Urban Child Welfare Leaders Group, build the agenda of their meetings in part around such knowledge-sharing.

Sometimes information-sharing can move beyond the confines of the network itself. For instance, during the formation of the PRI Makers Network, it became clear that many Casey staff needed a better understanding of social investments as a general concept, and of Program Related Investments in particular. A set of publications termed "PRI 101" by one interviewee was commissioned from an outside consultant. These served as a backup for meetings oriented to basic education on this subject, including sessions provided for personnel involved with the *Making Connections* and Civic sites.

Challenges The study also identified ten challenges that were faced by some if not most of the 19 Casey peer networking activities studied, and which also appear to have some generality of application for future peer networking by Casey or others:

• ***Peer networking is costly in both time and money*** For most interviewees knowledgeable about at least one of Casey's peer networking activities, their appraisal was consistent: peer networking appears to have impact, but it also is costly to implement, and these cost factors need to be weighed against the benefits achieved. While interviewees typically could not cite specific cost figures, and indeed the costs of some of these activities are difficult to estimate because they are intertwined with other programmatic activities, and involve staff time that has a cost, but isn't allocated to a specific peer networking budget.

In general, though, the supporting structure for peer networking as it has been done by the Foundation typically costs a lot both to implement and maintain (though sometimes long-term maintenance costs can be reduced, for instance, by moving from in-person to telephone conference call meetings). Just getting people together isn't enough (although for nationwide networks transportation costs alone can be substantial); there also are costs for planning and coordinating meetings or field-based peer matches, creating reports that document outcomes and make follow-up possible, and for creating communication channels, etc.

Cost factors apply at the individual level as well, particularly for community residents who participate in a peer network. "Life gets in the way much more," as one interviewee said. "If a child care provider doesn't show up you can't be at a meeting, ditto if the car breaks down."

Moreover, participating residents tend to be those most deeply involved in advocacy work in their communities, so choosing to participate in a particular peer network means that they can't devote those hours to some other cause. For all peer networks, the costs of networking are not just in dollars, but also in the number of "person-hours" that are devoted to the network, whether by Casey staff, consultants, other foundation executives, or community residents.

As a result, while "peer networking adds value to so much of what the Foundation does, we need to be clear about the purpose and the role. We need to staff and otherwise prepare for these activities appropriately. Nothing is more irritating than going to a peer network meeting and find that it is not well-prepared, clear and structured," as one interviewee expressed it. The template of "Return on Investment" must be applied to peer networking as much as to any other foundation-funded activity, applying all available metrics to determine whether the investment made has had adequate payoff to justify the commitment to it by all parties.

Building a good peer network takes time, which is in short supply at a foundation like Casey, where staff schedules are filled with many priorities and deadlines. As one interviewee expressed it, "There is a problem of fragmentation. We haven't given ourselves the time and space to fully explore our thinking on behalf of the Foundation and with our peers."

The most significant payoffs from peer networking may take a while to show up – and this may test the patience of decision-makers who want to see more immediate "Return on Investment." "There is a longitudinal power in peer networking," an interviewee stated. "Its benefits aren't always seen even in the first five to ten years – a foundation will reap rewards in the longer term through this kind of process." While some may argue about the 5-10 year time frame this interviewee asserts, there was wide agreement that a longitudinal view was helpful in looking at whether peer networking really achieves significant payoff.

• ***Participants in peer networking may find it difficult to take action on the good ideas they've developed*** Peer networking can generate great enthusiasm among participants, and sometimes this energy is directed immediately into setting and executing an action agenda (and framing such an agenda is often a specific element of the peer networking activity). However, in other cases, according to some interviewees, there may be a need to channel that energetic motivation into taking action, both practical and productive. "Folks get very excited about what they see," one interviewee said, "but the difficulty becomes containing and channeling that enthusiasm."

This reality can be addressed by what some see as one of the great strengths of the peer matching process. "If there's too much enthusiasm," this interviewee asserted, peer matching can help "bring people back to reality. We can say, look at how long it took those people to solve the problem, and with what resources."

• ***The goals of peer networking may be difficult to identify and to share with others*** Precisely because peer networks bring together people of like mind and interest (even though they may come from diverse parts of a community, they tend to share at least some central goals), whatever tensions may be involved in coming internally to a shared vision about their goals can be magnified when moving them outside the group. But interviewees emphasized that it is worth the extra time and effort to craft a communication about network goals that can be readily understood by "outsiders" to the group. Experience shows that, as one interviewee stated, "peer networks with a clear purpose are more likely to be successful." This is true both in their operation and the outcomes they achieve, the interviewee went on to state.

However, large, well-resourced foundations like Casey may choose to tolerate a certain amount of ambiguity in order to sort out how such an activity can best function. They can, in the words of this interviewee, "afford it, because they are a big foundation!" But more importantly, allowing ambiguity, especially early in the process of shaping an initiative, can increase the contribution peer networking makes to formulating a community change effort, because it gives people "comfortable space" to share divergent ideas that may not yet be well-formed in their own heads.

Peer networking activities may have difficulty in effectively presenting a "public face" to share their goals and results, once they have been defined in a reasonably clear manner. As an example, the Children & Family Fellows Alumni Network, in the words of one interviewee, has been better at "serving the interests of members directly, and less able to connect with the broader world" (e.g., for purposes of public policy advocacy).

In truth, a "public face" has not been presented for any of the 19 peer networking activities studied here, and this has been both a matter of choice and necessity. Peer networking by its nature has an element of "private conversation," so the choices for a more open sharing may be constrained, even though the goals of the group may be ones shared at large in the community.

• ***Peer networking may be difficult to integrate with other activities of its sponsor*** As already stated, peer networking as a general strategy has been hidden somewhat "under the radar" at Casey, both in its internal and external profile. This is true despite the importance and success of some early networking activities, such as in the *Making Connections* initiative and the Children and Family Fellows Alumni Network. Unless peer networking is at least mentioned as a significant element in the Foundation's overall philanthropic strategy, it will be difficult for its approaches and experiences to be fully integrated across the Foundation's many programs. The recommendations section of this report suggests some ways in which that broader integration could occur.

• ***It may be challenging to balance equality with expertise in selecting peer participants*** If there is too much emphasis on maintaining equality among the participants as "peers," it may be more difficult to identify and take advantage of expertise that some of the participants may have. As one interviewee remarked: "This is a challenge to the Foundation. Everybody at the table is equal in having thoughts or ideas, but sometimes we take this to a fault."

It also may be more difficult to bring outside experts into the group, to provide input on a temporary basis. Yet experts as members or as outsiders may have real contributions to make to the peer networking activity.

On the other hand, it is vital that all involved in the peer networking activity pay careful attention to power differentials of group members, and particularly those between funders and community residents (or other categories of participants that have built-in, major power differentials). Written philosophies, meeting rituals and periodic re-affirmations of equality all may be necessary to minimize the impact of these built-in differentials.

• ***Organizational complexity and culture of a sponsor may reduce the chances for success*** Peer networking is meant to open up the process of conversation, by which more input can be provided to a national foundation like Casey relevant to shaping its programs and priorities. But the organizational silos of a relatively large, bureaucratically-complicated organization like Casey, which has several hundred employees, can limit the impact of that open process. This is reflected by the fact that Casey staff working on one peer network often did not know much about other networks operated by their colleagues, even though there may have been significant learning potential in looking across networks for operating principles and problem-solving.

Even the heavy emphasis of the Foundation on process (such as the process involved in creating peer networks, as discussed above), in general a desirable thing, can negatively affect the chances for success of peer networking. This is true even with efforts to get broad involvement in the process of designing and implementing a foundation initiative.

"We put people into boxes of process," said one interviewee, with that process sometimes driving the interaction even when it is not the best method for promoting interaction. If this limits the willingness of group members to participate, as well as the payoffs for them from being part of the network, its overall goals may suffer.

Also, as emphasized by one interviewee, this bureaucratic complexity (as well as bad previous history with other funders – whether foundation, corporation or government) can make community participants concerned about the issue of "who owns the peer networking activity." Self-owned peer networks, for example, may represent a kind of community ideal, and funders may wish to consider establishing networking activities with this kind of independence, or at least moving towards it over time, as the initial phase of networking activity matures. Without such explicit attribution of ownership, community members may be reluctant to commit time and energy to the network.

The rules of etiquette in philanthropy also can get in the way of effective peer networking, if they make it more difficult to have a candid exchange. Foundation staff sometimes are reluctant to speak plainly, or to encourage plain speaking amongst others, which can lead to unhelpful exchanges. Interviewees in this study did not seem to feel that Casey had great difficulty in this area, however, and in fact pointed to ways in which the Foundation has been rather bold in the realm of candid exchange, through such efforts as publication of its pioneering self-critique *The Path of Most Resistance*. But Casey is still a part of the American foundation culture, and so its staff may still need to work intentionally on promoting within-group candor, free of any such "cultural barriers."

• ***It may be challenging to develop a good exit strategy for a peer networking activity*** From their inception, peer networking activities must focus on the challenges that will come in when they are "winding down," as such efforts are rarely intended to be permanent. This means both learning how to detect when it is time for an activity to wind down, and determining how to implement such a decision once made.

The experiences of the Child Welfare Training Directors Group are illustrative in that regard. This peer network moved towards its end in 2006, after a successful operation, in a very planful way. The final meeting included exercises designed to "say goodbye," and to wrap up the network's operation in ways that encouraged follow-up where appropriate, and that provided symbols of closure.

• ***Replicating peer networking activities may be difficult*** In many cases, people who are good at peer networking are not good at helping to replicate the model they've created (like the revolutionaries who win the war but then are no good at governing the country!). At the least, they will need assistance in developing a good replication strategy.

In particular, replication may be difficult because effective peer networking is so dependent on leadership. As was said about the leader of one of the peer networks studied in this research: "it takes somebody like this to keep it going; someone has to drive it a little. The weakness then is that the networking success depends on that one person."

• ***Participant turnover may limit the success of peer networking*** Over time, the membership of peer networks will change, and ways to address the resulting upheavals, major or minor, need to be created in advance. Most of the networks studied here reported some changes in representation, and noted that there was a need for orientation of new members representing a particular organization or community, and that this needed to be included in the routine operations of the network in order for it to happen in a timely way.

At the same time, periodically refreshing a peer network with some new members may help to sustain it (peer matching systems by their nature involve a constant flow of new participants). As one interviewee noted, the level of interaction among the Children and Family Fellows Alumni Network members "perked up" considerably after a new group of Fellows joined in January 2007.

• ***Individual and group psychological factors may limit the success of peer networking*** At some point in their life cycles, most ongoing peer networks will face some type of difficulty resulting from conflicts among members over goals and strategies, or personality clashes that can be disruptive to the process of the network. For instance, power differentials among supposedly "equal" members can never be entirely eliminated, and often must be dealt with if the peer networking is to be successful.

Peer matching efforts can be hit by this kind of difficulty as well. Especially for ongoing peer networks, setting up a system in advance by which conflicts will be handled is essential. This follows one of the basic principles of conflict resolution, that the members of a group know in advance what will happen if there is serious conflict or disagreement, and what will trigger these procedures to come into play.

Sometimes people are motivated to join a Casey peer network simply to facilitate access to the Foundation and its financial resources. Inquiries about what a potential member feels they can bring to the group may help select participants who are truly committed to the issues the peer network is addressing. The same may be true for potential participants who are really looking more for a personal support network than participation in an activity that's issue- and outcome-focused.

As stated by one interviewee, "the basic question must always be asked: peer networking for what? And this must be asked for all who participate, because people often do peer networking because they want money or access to it and see this as a price to pay. They show up to get the money rather than because they really think they can shape philanthropic strategy or otherwise benefit."

These priorities have to be balanced, of course, against the need for inclusiveness in a peer network. It is particularly important that both the inquiries and the decisions resulting be handled by the peer network members, not the foundation.

Further analysis of Casey's peer networking activities would of course reveal additional good practices and challenges. For instance, more vigorous efforts to identify the goals of peer networking up front are likely to result in better functioning of the network or peer matching system. And in many cases, what was presented by interviewees in this research as a challenge might be re-framed by others as a good practice (e.g., the balancing of equality versus expertise). These results are therefore presented as a "work in progress," designed to provide a useful place to begin in both understanding and shaping peer networking activities, by Casey or other sponsors.

Peer Networking in the Business Sector

Peer networking among business leaders is a long-established practice in all areas of the private sector. Much of it occurs informally, but in recent years the conference, the club and the golf course have been supplemented by special events and networking organizations that focus on peer learning as well as a more structured type of networking. These latter entities operate under many of the same principles as the peer networking activities discussed in this study.

There is some evidence of impact from these efforts. For instance, the Edward Lowe Foundation (2005) cites research findings that companies with executives who peer network grow faster, weather business cycles better and provide economic benefits to their employees.

Among the many events focused on peer networking in the private sector are the Davos World Economic Forum and the Renaissance Weekends, which have great prestige and worldwide media profiles. They represent a pinnacle of "exclusive" networks which also are very public in the reports on their gatherings.

Networking organizations of national prominence include the Young Presidents Organization (which now has more than 10,000 young global leaders), and Vista (formerly The Executive Committee, perhaps the best-established well-structured peer network in the business community, which brings together business leaders from different areas of work so that they can interact in a protected setting, without fear they'll divulge information to their competitors). Other networking organizations include the Social Venture Network (focused on philanthropic activity), and the Harvard Executive Education Program (which provides high-quality management education and has a powerful alumni network, now thousands strong and considered one of the key assets acquired by participating in the training itself).

Increasingly, peer networking has moved into the corporate design and development process as well. For example, peer networks in manufacturing involve customers shaping products like Lego Mindstorms and the Sony Aibo, with significant positive results. In the political arena, several recent elections in America and other countries have been shaped by peer networking, as has the antiglobalization movement.

Much of the peer networking on both the business and social development fronts is done via the cell phone and the internet (e.g., with listservs, and sometimes assisted by ever-more-influential blogs). And in fact, the business community is often involved in social change networking, sometimes directly through corporate websites, webinars, etc.

In her recent book, *Pull: Networking and Success Since Ben Franklin*, author Pamela Laird (2006) focused on networking as a method for deploying social assets in business and government. While her focus is on individuals' use of networking approaches, the underlying concept that networking skill is an asset directly related to success in the business and government worlds also is relevant to the discussion here. One of the reasons that peer networking is more than ever an "idea whose time has come" is that individuals are increasingly recognizing not only the value of the process, but also the value of structures that encourage the interconnections and sharing.

Business observers note that cooperation is starting to replace commodity-based capitalism and competition in some arenas, while leaving other aspects of competition intact, and this also is promoting more use of peer networking (Savieri et al, 2004). At the most general level, networks are replacing hierarchies throughout society – open source software is just one example. These developments increase both awareness of peer networking as a strategy for success, and experiences people have with such approaches, thus making them more receptive to peer networking associated with philanthropic or nonprofit activity.

For some years the author has participated in a peer network in Los Angeles called the Senior Consultants Group, a small and informal body of experienced management consultants who come from psychology and other disciplines. In presenting some preliminary findings to this group in July 2006, the reaction obtained was that the greatest benefit of peer networking in the private sector (which they felt was equally important in the philanthropic and nonprofit sectors) was that it afforded time to *process*.

Time for reflection and integration is vital to improving both individual practice and institutional work (the lack thereof was a universal complaint in the internal interviews conducted for this study, and the Senior Consultants Group felt that its lack in the executive suite is a major problem in American business). Continuous improvement of the sort described at the beginning of this report, as a major element of Casey's philosophy about transformational change, requires processing that can only take place in semi-structured environments with people who are responsible for change.

Technology also plays an increasing role in peer networking for the business world (and is on the rise in the public and philanthropic sectors as well, as some of the discussion above makes clear). For instance, advanced computer software systems called groupware (e.g., Lotus Notes) facilitate peer networking in the business sector.

Moreover, some of terms used throughout this report have their origins in technology (involving both software and hardware) referred to commonly as "peer to peer" networking or file-sharing. "P2P" is a computer term standing for multiple computers connected so they can share files and resources without a dedicated server, a useful mechanical analogy to the human processes emphasized here.

Transformational Change in the Business Sector

Management science and experiences from the business sector in large-scale change have been touted as an important source for thinking and action by nonprofit organizations on systems change (e.g., Savieri et al, 2004). That also may apply to understanding about transformational change and peer networking in the foundation world, as explored in this study.

There is an important caution, however. Recent research shows that most large-scale or transformational change approaches from the business sector have, in the end, not worked very well.

For instance, in his book *Leading Change*, Harvard Business School professor John Kotter reports the results of a decade-long study of more than 100 companies that have engaged in significant organizational transformation. The change programs Kotter studied included efforts at implementing total quality management, re-engineering, "rightsizing," restructuring, organization-wide cultural change and corporate turnarounds (Kotter, 1995).

His results? "A few of these corporate change efforts have been very successful. A few have been utter failures. Most fall somewhere in between, with a distinct tilt toward the lower end of the scale." Most mergers, fail, too, with compelling research that a few years later neither party to the merger has produced increased shareholder value. John Kotter's more recent book, *The Heart of Change* (2002), presents strategies for dealing with this challenge, mostly emphasizing involvement of employees in the change process, and other strategies intended to deal with the complicated human realities resulting from the prospect of change.

MIT's Michael Hammer (1995) acknowledges that two-thirds of re-engineering interventions have failed, and his analysis points to staff resistance as the single most important cause. People's innate resistance to change is "the most perplexing, annoying, distressing, and confusing part" of re-engineering, says Hammer. Resistance to change "is natural and inevitable. To think that resistance won't occur or to view those who exhibit its symptoms as difficult or retrograde is a fatal mistake ... The real cause of re-engineering failures is not the resistance itself but management's failure to deal with it." Again, the lesson from evaluations of re-engineering is that handling sensitively the human aspects of change is critical (e.g., hearing out people's fears and finding ways to respond to them, sometimes by changing the intervention).

Both Hammer and Kotter, along with other management scientists who have studied major change in the corporate world also present examples of transformational changes that have worked well. The transformation of car maker Jaguar from a very troubled to a successful and high-quality-level operation is a compelling example. But these cautions about how major changes have been addressed by large corporations, with all the resources and expertise at their disposal, need to be looked at carefully when designing similar kinds of shifts in the foundation arena.

Transformational Change in Philanthropy

On the foundation side, peer networking is not the only or even the most common method for introducing significant change into the philanthropic strategies of large, staffed foundations – especially those that also affect how the foundation deals with the process of making such changes. The three most common "triggers" of transformational change, according to those interviewed for this study, are (1) the death of a donor, (2) the arrival of a new foundation CEO, or (3) the appointment of a new board chair. Sometimes large-scale changes take place primarily in response to external events (such as major changes at Ford and Rockefeller after World War II), or internal changes such as sudden growth of a foundation's assets, as happened for the William and Melinda Gates Foundation with the multibillion dollar donation made by Warren Buffett in June 2006.

Inevitably, these changes involve major shifts in organizational structure and leadership, grantmaking process, and how resources actually get allocated. If done well, they also involve strategic re-shaping of how change is handled, developing new and improved pathways for re-shaping philanthropic strategy as external or internal events require it.

Those who try to win "tomorrow's war with yesterday's weapons" are less likely to succeed, according to those interviewed for this study. It is that combination of changed strategy and changed approach to handling future change that characterizes effective transformational change, whether done via peer networking or other approaches briefly reviewed here for comparison purposes.

In many cases, the leadership for transformational change is provided by a foundation CEO, by its board, or by staff or outside consultants. One interviewee described the process of transformational change as he experienced it as a senior executive in several foundations in succession – in each case, "the major change in philanthropic strategy was called for by the trustees, new senior management was brought in to implement the change, consultants were called upon to help, and some gathering of input from relevant stakeholders in the foundation's areas of interest was done." But each foundation brings its own culture, as well as its past history of handing change, to this task of transformation. Both help to shape the change process in distinctive ways.

These fundamental shifts are risky and sometimes traumatic for the staff, trustees, grantees and communities participating in them. Some have succeeded, others have failed. All carry with them the need for careful strategy. In the words of one interviewee, "when you're looking at fundamental transformation, you've moved beyond training, best practices, operations – the things that are more visible. Most people are more comfortable there, because as you move into transformation there are more intangible elements."

Morever, successful transformation requires a context of continuity. As one interviewee stated, "Boards may think that transformation happens by radical change but it must be within bounds or it won't be productive."

This discussion of transformational change may be of little relevance to the individual peer networking activities examined by this study. However, an argument already has been made, and will be expanded in the report's last section, that there may be some advantages to looking at Casey's peer networking work in a more comprehensive way, both to share good practices and challenges across activities (as has been done preliminarily in this study), and to consider how peer networking fits into Casey's overall philanthropic strategy (e.g., as an implementation method for the Casey philosophy that "conversation matters"). If such a shift takes place, it is more likely to promote some type of change on the "transformational" level, which will make the above cautions and the resources outlined in the next section more pertinent to Casey.

Resources for Guiding Transformational Change in Philanthropy For many years, foundations had little to draw upon other than their own experiences with past changes, or the resources (also experience-based) provided to them by colleagues or consultants – after all, philanthropy has only recently become a field of study in even a few universities, and the conduct of research on philanthropic practice is a relatively new endeavor. But there is now a growing literature and practice wisdom about how to structure and apply this leadership for transformational change, and many of the interviewees in this study drew upon this knowledge base in making their comments.

As philanthropy has become a more professional field, studies focused on philanthropic strategy have increased somewhat, though as Fleishman (2007) comments, the literature on this topic is still quite limited. Backer (1999) reviewed a number of the early environmental scans of foundation effectiveness, including those arising out of the venture philanthropy movement in the 1990s. A particularly influential early article was Porter & Kramer's (1999) *Harvard Business Review* article, which set forth an approach to strategic philanthropy based in management sciences. Lake, Reis & Spann (2000) discuss how program officers were central in the shift from a hands-off to a more engaged model of grantee interaction, as part of the philanthropic strategy of one large foundation.

A comprehensive review of foundation effectiveness strategies was undertaken by Joel Orosz at Grand Valley State University (2004), providing an analytic comparison of a number of the initial efforts in the late 1990s, through the early part of the current century, to study or guide philanthropic effectiveness. Approaches to changing philanthropic strategy in a variety of domains have been documented in a series of practice guides by Patti Patrizi and colleagues (2003-05). Among the topics discussed in these guides are principles for evaluation and for collaboration activities by foundations.

Other recent works include a survey of foundation effectiveness by Francie Ostrower and colleagues at the Urban Institute (2004). This survey examined attitudes and practices about measuring the achievement of philanthropic goals from more than 1,000 staffed foundations in the U.S. In turn, Ostrower's study was one of ten related research projects reviewed by Foundationworks (2006) in a synthesis of approaches to foundation effectiveness, grantee needs and public perceptions – all intended to have an impact on philanthropic practice.

In another study of foundation approaches to effectiveness, Ostrower (2006) concentrated on community foundations. Her findings suggest that community foundations could enhance their effectiveness by bringing together different parts of the community in relationship to community needs – something for which peer networking approaches could be very useful.

Similarly, Hunter, Parzen & Brown (2004) assert that community foundations face increasing pressures to demonstrate their effectiveness, which they can do so in part by becoming community change makers (thus distinguishing themselves from private donor advised fund providers such as Fidelity). They can contribute ideas and information, foster strategic communication, expand resources devoted to community change, and promote performance – all activities in which peer networking efforts supported by community foundations could play a major role.

Major change efforts in the foundation world have been studied by Helmut Anheier and Diana Leat in their 2006 book, *Creative Philanthropy.* Anheier and Leat see relationships as one of the key assets foundations have, and that successful philanthropic strategy includes attention to building rich networks of different types of people at different levels within their foundations and out in the community. They assert that such networks increase access to ideas and perspectives, and can be useful to test out ideas and recruit champions to assist with the work of change.

Most recently, Fleishman (2007) weaves together approaches to "scientific philanthropy" that go back to the strategies used by Carnegie and Rockefeller in the early part of the 20th century with modern methods such as those emerging from venture philanthropy. Thinking strategically involves a set of stages – get the facts by research, identify problems, study potential options, identify who can help or hinder the changes needed, develop a plan of action including objectives and benchmarks, implement the change and gather data on results.

These methods in particular can increase the ability of a foundation to respond to "unpredictable opportunities." Fleishman's historical analysis of how foundations have contributed the most in the past makes it clear that keeping this response to uncertainty alive makes a major difference.

Strategies by which foundations can become learning organizations have been studied by Hamilton and colleagues (2005), by Bernholz (2002) and are summarized in Backer (2005). The role of learning and knowledge management in transformational change has been emphasized in these works, and forms part of the framework for Casey's activities in this area as well.

Hamilton et al (2005) identified seven core components of foundations that have a major commitment to being "learning organizations." Two of them are directly relevant to the use of peer networking strategies – creating learning partnerships among foundation peers, and creating learning partnerships with grantees and communities. These partnerships, to be truly effective, need to involve sustained engagement over time, and like all peer networking efforts, are focused on exchanging insights and lessons, exploring, uncovering and generating new knowledge; and articulating new questions and learning agendas.

Backer (2006) presents some similar approaches used by individual donors in philanthropy learning groups. These groups are one part of a growing movement among donors to become more strategic in their giving. Peer networking has long been used by donors but has now become more strategic, through groups that manifest many of the same qualities as the groups studied here.

And the inquiries into how the "practice of change" in philanthropic strategy can be improved is continuing. For instance, The Center for Effective Philanthropy is currently conducting an interview-based study of 20 large foundations, focused on how they have developed their overall philanthropic strategy (Bolduc et al, 2006).

They note that foundations can benefit from defining a strategy for the same reason such approaches add value for businesses and nonprofits: to increase effectiveness through unique positioning in a particular environment, to maintain responsiveness to external changes, and to appropriately align internal resources. But some foundation leaders actually resist embracing a sharply-defined organizational strategy, citing their "belief that flexibility, responsiveness and pluralism are important foundation strategies that could be undermined by implementation of strategies" (p. 8).

Examples of Transformational Change in Philanthropy Many examples could be given of individual foundations that have implemented transformational changes in their overall philanthropic strategy. The two highlighted here come from foundations with which Casey has ongoing ties through the peer networks studied.

The *Ventures Program at Northwest Area Foundation* was begun in 1998, about the same time that Casey was implementing *Making Connections*. It is a ten-year, $167 million effort to promote community poverty reduction in 10 sites over an eight-state area, with a heavy investment in increasing the power of community residents to make their own solutions to the problems of poverty. Ventures also is aimed at testing strategies that then could be applied in other communities both in NWAF's eight-state region and across the country ("identifying, sharing and advocating for what works").

The Ventures program represents a major change in its philanthropic strategy, again moving from a wide-ranging program of smaller grants over an eight-state region, to initiatives that concentrate resources in a small number of sites, such as the 10 of the Ventures program. Ventures has shifted resources from a number of communities in which the Foundation traditionally gave money, a fact that has led to several lawsuits (each of them resolved in favor of the Foundation).

The *John S. & James L. Knight Foundation* made wide-ranging changes in their philanthropic strategy five years ago, converting from what had been largely a centralized operation with most decisions made at the national level by program directors in several programs (arts, education, journalism), to a system in which Community Advisory Committees in each of the Foundation's 26 communities of interest are much more actively involved in setting program priorities and in selecting grants that are awarded in response to these announced priorities (e.g., learning readiness for schoolchildren, in a number of the 26 cities). Field-placed program officers assist in carrying out these initiatives.

After an examination of the operation of this new system over several years, a refinement is currently being implemented. In the revised system, field-placed program officers will have a larger arena of responsibility in setting program priorities, but much authority will still rest with the Community Advisory Committees.

There are many other examples of large-scale change in larger and more traditionally-organized foundations. One that has been analyzed repeatedly in the philanthropic press is the *Edna McConnell Clark Foundation.* While maintaining a mission focus on youth development, Clark transitioned from providing a number of smaller grants to nonprofits to making much larger strategic investments in a handful of youth-serving agencies that have been through a "vetting" process indicating that they can benefit from such an investment.

At the other end of the experience spectrum, new foundations that have emerged recently from the technology industry, with much younger donors at the helm, have made major shifts in direction. For instance, the Omidyar Foundation now is the *Omidyar Network*, which makes strategic investments to achieve social goals both in nonprofit and for-profit ventures.

Relationship to Peer Networking in Philanthropy
In "Leading Boldly," their analysis of several recent examples of assertive foundation leadership in promoting community or systems change, Mark Kramer and his colleagues (Heifetz, Kenner & Kramer, 2005) look at how different the strategies for change need to be when dealing with technical issues versus what they term "adaptive problems." The latter kinds of problems grow out of conflicting values or contradictions between internal values and external realities. For these problems, a central task is to mobilize people to clarify what matters most, so that sensible solutions addressing balance and tradeoffs can emerge in a less-than-perfect situation. Peer networking is a potentially powerful tool for dealing with adaptive problems.

Peer networking provides an ongoing platform for that kind of dialogue. Foundations, the "Leading Boldly" authors note, tend to fight adaptive problems with technical tools. Instead they need to frame complex issues in ways people can comprehend the challenges and opportunities they face, and offer a place in which these can be discussed openly and in a trusting environment – the kind of circumstances in which a peer network can play an essential role. Moreover, the members of the peer network bring in turn all of their networking contacts to the group's enterprise, which can significantly increase its power.

Where foundation peer networks are concerned, the issue emphasis of peer networking also fits with the increasing preference of younger donors to focus on content and on real learning in their networking activities. Networking either for social purposes or for a kind of un-differentiated "professional development" are not as appealing as they may have been in the past. This has had considerable impact on training and development activities both for individual donors and for foundations large and small (Hamilton et al, 2005).

Expanding and Enhancing Casey's Peer Networking Activities

Results from this study suggest six ways to expand and enhance Casey's peer networking activities:

(1) Integrate peer networking internally with the Foundation's philanthropic strategy ;

(2) Disseminate learnings about peer networking through Casey's Knowledge Management system;

(3) Hold a consultative session to synthesize and advance knowledge on peer networking;

(4) Promote links of Casey peer networks to other networks, both internal and external;

(5) Explore refinements in peer networking, such as low-cost approaches and methods for including community residents; and

(6) Evaluate the impact of Casey's peer networking activities

Each of these recommendations is discussed further here.

(1) ***Integrate peer networking internally with the Foundation's philanthropic strategy*** Significant investments in peer networking activities have been made by Casey over the last 10 years. This study suggests that some positive impact has resulted from these investments, that some approaches have worked better than others, and that there are identifiable limitations to this method based upon experiences to date. While specific peer networking activities have been quite visible, the overall scope of these efforts has remained "below the radar screen." To lift up peer networking activities internally as a more formal part of the Foundation's philanthropic strategy, Casey needs to: (a) create a statement on peer networking and its place in achieving the Foundation's mission and (b) develop guidelines for considering, implementing and evaluating a peer networking activity.

(a) create a goal statement on peer networking and its place in achieving the Foundation's mission Such a statement would frame how peer networking activities of all types serve the common purpose of helping Casey advance community change and public systems reform to assist vulnerable children and families. While maintaining the individual creativity and flexibility required for good peer networking in Casey's many initiatives, such a statement can help create a more organized body of practice for peer networking at Casey, and make it a more intentional part of the culture within the Foundation.

The goal statement also could help align these activities more fully with the Foundation's comprehensive annual planning and budgeting process. At present, Casey's investments in peer networking are quite idiosyncratic to each activity. Opportunities for synergy and cross-activity learning are likely to result once such a framework is made available.

(b) develop guidelines for considering, implementing and evaluating a peer networking activity Building on this goal statement, a set of guidelines could then be constructed about how to decide whether peer networking is a wise investment for a particular Casey initiative (in some cases, peer networking may *not* be a useful strategy); how to implement such an activity if it does seem likely to advance the Foundation's overall mission; and where to begin the task of setting performance criteria useful for evaluation.

For instance, each Casey peer networking activity needs a clear purpose statement. Each activity can build on the set of common good practices and challenges identified in this study. Initial planning can begin with the set of questions presented earlier.

Sub-sections of a guidelines document might focus on particular challenges of peer networking – how to evaluate these activities, how to "wind down" a peer network when it has served its purpose, how to deal with the challenges of member transition in a peer network, etc. This brief guidelines document can in turn be linked to knowledge resources on peer networking available through Casey's Knowledge Management system.

(2) ***Disseminate learnings about peer networking through Casey's Knowledge Management system*** This report is just one of a number of knowledge products Casey has created that could help in planning new Casey peer networking efforts or in refining existing ones. The goal statement and guidelines just discussed can serve as the organizing frame for presenting these products, both through the newly-organized public website, and the internal e-Casey system.

The first step would be to inventory these products. Some are published, such as the several reports of the Center for the Study of Social Policy cited in this report. Others are still in final draft form, and need to be readied for publication if they are to be used widely by Casey staff and others. One of the difficulties of this study was obtaining information in print form about Casey's peer networking activities – likely a main reason many Casey staff did not know about any peer networking activities except the ones in which they were directly involved!

A second step would be to inventory current and completed Casey peer networking efforts, using this report as a starting point. Such a "peer networking directory" might contain the name, purpose, activities and products of each activity, along with a contact person.

The e-Casey system, which has components like an electronic newsletter for Casey staff and video streaming, can offer resources such as periodic updates on the peer networking activities examined in this research, and the video on peer networking and Communities of Practice prepared after these two subjects were presented at a July 2006 Casey Management Committee meeting. Original videos could also be commissioned, for instance presenting interviews with peer networking participants about their experiences and insights. Some of these resources could be made available in the public portion of the Casey website as well, offering knowledge in somewhat the same way as has been done on other topics of importance to Casey, such as place-based philanthropy.

As is being done with other elements of Casey's KM system, input from philanthropic, nonprofit and community colleagues can be sought on what information about peer networking is of most value, and how best to present it. As Casey learns more about the successes and challenges of its own peer networking activities, this information can be shared through the KM system. Also, through print or video interviews, Casey might offer access to the learnings of other leaders in the peer networking arena, e.g., the Ventures program at Northwest Area Foundation.

In addition, findings from this study and other knowledge about Casey's peer networking activities can be disseminated through (a) articles for journals such as *Stanford Social Innovation Review*, (b) development of a practice-oriented summary of this report by Grantcraft (including a diagnostic tool based on the study findings, to help foundation staff determine whether they're "doing peer networking well"), and (c) articles for print and electronic news publications in philanthropy like The Chronicle of Philanthropy and the newsletter of the Foundation Center. Presentations about study findings can be made at conferences such as those of the Council on Foundations, Grantmakers for Effective Organizations, Forum of Regional Association of Grantmakers, and so forth.

GEO may be a particularly valuable channel, because of its emphasis on organizational capacity building, and may offer dissemination opportunities through its electronic newsletter and other means. Current GEO board chair Beth Bruner has extensive experience with peer networking through Bruner Foundation's support of the Rochester Effectiveness Partnership, and may be able to advise Casey about how to best interact with GEO on this subject.

Some of the peer networks studied in this research may provide platforms for dissemination to groups of interested foundations. The Long Term Funders Exchange and the Lead Program Executives networks may be especially likely candidates in this regard. Finally, the Center for the Study of Social Policy already has begun to explore how it might share some of the learnings from its TARC work with other foundations, which may identify possibilities for dissemination.

(3) Hold a consultative session to synthesize and advance knowledge on peer networking In 2001, the Center for the Study of Social Policy (in collaboration with the EZ/EC Foundation Consortium) brought together 12 organizations to discuss peer learning and peer networking activities. The session resulted in a joint publication. At a February 2007 meeting, CSSP staff suggested that it would be valuable for Casey and for the field to hold a similar convening in the near future.

(a) selecting participants This consultative session would bring together (a) key internal leaders of Casey peer networks and peer matching systems, (b) selected representatives from Casey communities from *Making Connections* and other initiatives, and (c) selected foundation, nonprofit and business leaders interested in peer networking as a strategy for systems change. The Center for the Study of Social Policy might coordinate the meeting. This report and its author could serve as a resource, as could Etienne Wenger and Bill Snyder and their upcoming report on application of Communities of Practice approaches in a *Making Connections* site (see further discussion below).

(b) reviewing the basic concepts of peer networking The consultative session might begin with an overview of principles and strategies for peer networking, how they've been applied at Casey and elsewhere, and what has been learned so far as a result. Drawbacks and limitations of peer networking as a concept could also be discussed, drawing on the notion expressed by Charlie Munger, co-chair of Berkshire Hathaway. At the company's 2006 shareholders meeting he emphasized that "it isn't a competency if you don't know the edges of it."

(c) applying peer networking to new Casey initiatives Then the session could explore whether peer networking approaches (and the accumulated knowledge about it at Casey) might contribute to several key new Casey initiatives:

• plans for establishing a "national program office" for *Making Connections,* marking a major shift away from the current mode of Casey site-based personnel

• site-based activities to promote sustainability of *Making Connections* after Casey's funding ends (peer networking could be a vital part of planning for sustainability and actually bringing together the community resources needed to sustain both the *Making Connections* infrastructure – for however long it might be needed – and in the larger frame to promote efforts to incorporate the principles of *Making Connections* into nonprofit and community operations so they become part of the "organizational DNA")

• plans for a "*Making Connections* Institute" to share lessons learned from this initiative with other foundations that might be interested in exploring some similar paths to community-based systems change

• related work on systems approaches to change that Casey is exploring with Canadian foundations (primarily through Philanthropic Foundations Canada), and with United Ways in the U.S.

(d) comparing peer networking with related concepts Next, the session might look at peer networking from a more conceptual standpoint, to determine whether some further shaping of Casey's definition of this social process might be in order. Peer networking has "permeable boundaries" with some related types of activities which may offer opportunities for increasing understanding or actual cross-fertilization:

• *Mentoring* is a one-on-one, mutually trusting relationship in which a more experienced individual shares knowledge and provides guidance to someone less experienced.

• *Coaching* is typically a one-on-one relationship in which the coach helps unlock a person's potential to maximize their own performance by helping them to learn.

• *Reflective Practice* involves systematically thinking about and learning from one's own practice in order to improve it, a concept from the teaching field.

• *Communities of Practice* are "groups of people informally bound together by shared expertise and passion for a joint enterprise" and exist widely in business, e.g., more than 60 in one unit of IBM (Gongla & Rizzuto, 2001).

Although in fact Communities of Practice and peer networking share many basic features, there is a difference in the former's emphasis on a body of knowledge and skill related to some specific type of practice (e.g., practice in a specific professional discipline). It is possible that existing peer networks Casey has helped create might morph into Communities of Practice as a body of knowledge and practice evolves around them.

There are also many overlaps between the two concepts both conceptually. For example, the "good practices" of peer networking described above are similar in many ways to seven basic principles of Communities of Practice (but there are also some distinctive features of the latter which could be usefully added to peer networking strategies). These seven basic principles are:

(1) design for evolution;
(2) open a dialogue between inside and outside perspectives;
(3) invite different levels of participation;
(4) develop both public and private convening space;
(5) focus on value;
(6) combine familiarity and excitement; and
(7) create a rhythm for the community

Casey provided grant support to Etienne Wenger and Bill Snyder, the main conceptualizers of communities of practice, to field-test use of the COP approach at a *Making Connections* site. The intervention started with efforts to educate site coordinators and the results team, and moved from there to a more general educational effort in the community. A draft report from the pilot intervention was submitted to Casey in August 2007, which sets forth its purposes and results in more detail than can be provided here.

(e) exploring related activities in philanthropy Representatives of other foundations at this session could help Casey put its peer networking efforts into the larger context of other efforts foundations are making to shape their philanthropic strategies. In the present study, one interviewee asked whether "Casey would consider bringing together the increasingly diverse structures of philanthropy that are, in the end, all engaged in the same cause? We seem to be consumed with our own type of philanthropy, rather than looking for ways to grow all kinds of philanthropy, and to build partnerships between us." The interviewee used the tension between community foundations and commercial gift funds as an example. However, the peer networking infrastructures developed for foundations vs communities vs individual donors vs their trusted advisors could also be an example.

(f) exploring related activities in the private sector In addition to exploring similar work by other foundations, further shaping and refining of these approaches might be facilitated by including in this consultative session an examination of work on transformational change and peer networking in the private sector.

If this exploration was found fruitful, a future consultative session might bring together a small group of experts in business peer networking (and related concepts such as Communities of Practice, etc.) and experts in transformational change in the private sector (Frances Hesselbein of the Leader to Leader Institute, or Harvard's John Kotter and Michael Hammer of MIT, whose work on transformational change in the corporate sector was discussed earlier, are examples). A "collision of ideas" with these private sector experts and operators of some of Casey's networks, plus those doing cutting-edge work on transformational change in philanthropy, could be very useful.

(g) exploring possible publication of session results Finally, the consultative session could look at whether its own deliberations and outcomes could form the basis for a new Casey publication on peer networking. Also, the participants might consider starting a "peer network on peer networking" that would initially help to edit and refine a session publication, but that might be maintained, at least in an internet environment, to provide support for the work of Casey and other participating funders doing work on this topic.

(4) *Promote links of Casey peer networks to other networks, both internal and external* Three different linkages might be part of this effort:

a. First, linkages can be made ***inside Casey***, bringing together peer networking managers and selected members of peer networks for a cross-cutting discussion on specific issues and lessons learned. In particular, the "family" of *Making Connections* peer networking efforts might benefit from linkage with those leading activities like the Urban Child Welfare Directors Group or the Language Access Network, where the purposes are different but some core processes are similar.

b. Second, linkages might be established with ***similar organizations*** having content domains and values somewhat like Casey's. This has already been done by the Urban Child Welfare Leaders Group in its collaborative relationship with the Pew Commission on Child Welfare, with more intensive collaborations planned for the future. Among other things, this makes possible resource-sharing that increases the potential for impact of these activities.

As discussed previously in this report, the Northwest Area Foundation has implemented some community and systems change initiatives that are similar to some of Casey's strategies, but there are also important differences (e.g., in how much initial leadership is taken on by community residents). NAF also has implemented "Ventures Fridays," a peer network bringing together the foundation staff involved in these community-based initiatives to talk about and learn from them. Community-based staff come from a wide variety of perspectives, ranging from secondary education to economic development. This provides a rich diversity to the network's dialogue about the Ventures program. How might Casey learn both about peer networking process and about change strategies from NAF's work? Would a peer match be productive?

c. Third, external links might be made with somewhat ***dissimilar organizations***, in keeping with the argument made by Duncan Watts, author of *Six Degrees* (2003), that in many complex systems, clusters of strongly linked nodes can inexpensively extend their reach by adding a few "weak links" to other clusters. As mentioned earlier, weak links are useful because they are made between people who don't know each other well, and thus don't share the same set of knowledge and contacts, thus making it more likely that they will bring in "new blood" to the exchange of ideas.

For instance, a link could be made with a peer networking activity involving foundations, but where the funders involved have somewhat different agendas than Casey's, such as a regional geographical emphasis. An example is the Kellogg-Kauffman Seminar, an annual meeting of 20 midwestern-region foundation CEOs, at which they explore both content issues and process matters such as board and staff relationships. The Aspen Institute, which now operates the Long Term Funders Exchange, also coordinates this seminar, which would provide an easy way of making the connection.

(5) Explore refinements in peer networking, such as low-cost approaches and methods for better including community residents As already discussed, many of Casey's current approaches to peer networking are costly (though the costs vary widely), and there is reason to believe that for many problem areas and communities, the long-term, high-level investment in supporting the infrastructure for peer networking does pay off in terms of impact. In other cases the probable "Return on Investment" for a full-scale peer networking activity might not justify taking on these costs. But a "stripped down" approach could have a good "ROI," and in some cases might replace a more costly approach when peer networking for initial development of a community or systems change initiative has been completed, and a lower level of "maintenance" activity is needed.

Simplified approaches to peer networking include those that utilize something as simple as a listserv to bring people together online for discussion of issues and strategies related to a particular Casey initiative. This could be combined with some of the other principles for effective peer networking identified by this study.

Other stripped-down versions that could be explored include webinars, an approach used by the Lead Program Executives peer network, or telephone conference calls or video conferences. Several experiences reported in this study show that established Casey peer networks have been able to move from in-person meetings to telephone conference calls as a way of continuing the efforts of the peer network while reducing the financial and human costs.

Also, peer networks may not be equally efficient for residents in poor communities as for social elites (foundation staff, welfare directors, etc.). For instance, peer networking involves startup time, investment in learning and strategy that low resiliency people may not have to give. How can Casey evaluate the effectiveness of peer networks that include residents, and how might these networks be re-shaped to better accommodate the realities of these members? As one interviewee put it, "Peer networks are a powerful way to work with elites but not as quick or efficient with communities, where some sort of community organizing strategy may work better."

(6) ***Evaluate peer networking*** As this study has revealed, peer networking already is making important contributions to shaping and implementing the Annie E. Casey Foundation's philanthropic strategy, particularly in its *Making Connections* initiative. The Foundation has made a significant investment of financial and staff resources in peer networking.

Available evidence suggests that there have been useful results from this investment, ranging from specific elements of Casey initiatives created through the peer process, to self-reports of satisfaction with this "way of doing business." For instance, a customer satisfaction survey commissioned by Casey reported 100 percent satisfaction with technical assistance provided through peer matches.

But this is not guaranteed. As stated by one interviewee in this study, "peer networks are a lot of work and money for not always a lot of benefit. Some peer networks really work well and many don't, but I suspect many funders stick with them because they have made a commitment, or don't have a lot of alternatives."

If peer networking is to become a more systemic part of Casey's overall philanthropic strategy, its costs, benefits and outcomes need to be determined, both for individual activities and across all of the efforts the Foundation has undertaken in this domain. A first step would be an analytic study of Casey's financial investments in peer networking to date, including both developmental and operational costs.

To do so, each peer network or peer matching system (including but not limited to the 19 studied here) would provide an estimate of the costs of peer networking in the most recent fiscal year. Results from such an analysis would be extremely tentative, especially given lack of comparability between various activities and inability in many cases to separate peer networking costs from those of other activities. But such a study could help begin a dialogue about cost-benefit of this approach. Studies to analyze peer networking activities from a more rigorous standpoint could be useful to evaluate both process and outcome. Evaluative activity could help to improve the operation of Casey peer networks and peer matching systems, make it easier to share them in other settings (both within Casey and throughout philanthropy), and help to justify the investment in these systems for Casey trustees and leadership.

A judgment has been made that peer networking for Casey's purposes needs to be resource-intensive with an ongoing structure, so that the deeper, trustful kinds of interactions described in this study are possible. However, the advantages of this system over other, possibly much less expensive interventions as described above can only be judged fairly if there is some idea about how much the current way of doing things costs.

Evaluations also can explore the natural life cycle of peer networking activities. The good practices, challenges and questions framed here are tied to some extent to the life cycle of peer networks and peer matching systems. Part of institutionalizing peer networking at Casey or in any other setting comes from understanding what these natural life cycles are. Some Casey peer networks have already concluded and others have limited life spans built into their organization - what can be learned from these, as well as the peer networking activities that continue?

Similarly, there are at least two levels where "simultaneous loose-tight properties" may apply. One is at the level of the individual peer networking activity – what is the right balance between structure and flexibility/spontaneity for an effort that draws so much on interpersonal relationships? But there is also a larger level – how much structure of good practices and other supporting features will help peer networking evolve in a desirable way at Casey or in any other setting?

There is a paradoxical quality to peer networking – trying to make the informal formal can impede success, but this study has made it clear that some level of structure is related to success. If peer networking and communities of practice are on a continuum of some sort, it may also be that some peer networks will evolve into communities of practice as the content of the networking activity becomes more clear and professionally focused.

All of these steps are suggested as ways of expanding, making more rigorous, and integrating (into Casey's overall philanthropic strategy and learning systems) the basic element of Casey's peer networking activities ... that conversation matters!

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Appendix A. Study Interviewees

The Annie E. Casey Foundation Staff Interviews

Clarice Bailey (consultant)
Ira Barbell
John Beilenson (consultant)
Rosa Briceno (CSSP)
Patrick Corvington
Frank Farrow
Leila Feister (consultant)
Juanita Gallion (CSSP)
Audrey Jordan
Tom Kern
Sherri Killens
Irene Lee
Wanda Mial
Patrick McCarthy
Phyllis Rozansky (consultant)
Miriam Shark
Bill Shephardson (CSSP)
Ralph Smith
Donna Stark
Christa Velasquez
Roger Williams

(CSSP - staff of Center for the Study of Social Policy, which administers TARC Peer Matching for the foundation)

Thought Leader Interviews

Alan Abramson, formerly of Aspen Institute
Helmut Anheier, UCLA Center for Civil Society
John Bare, Blank Foundation
Lucy Bernholz, Blueprint R&D
Elizabeth Boris, The Urban Institute
Joe Breitenacher, The Philanthropic Initiative
Phil Buchanan, Center for Effective Philanthropy
Tom David, Tides Center
James Ferris, USC Center on Philanthropy
Alan Glassman, California State University Northridge
Gordon Goodwin, Northwest Area Foundation
Steve Gunderson, Council on Foundations
Ralph Hamilton, Chapin Hall
Steve Hilton, Conrad Hilton Foundation
Elwood Hopkins, Los Angeles Urban Funders
ellery july, formerly of Northwest Area Foundation
Peter Karoff, The Philanthropic Initiative
Mark Kramer, Foundation Strategy Group
Anne Kubisch, Aspen Institute
Lorna Lathram, formerly of Indiana University
Lauren LeRoy, Grantmakers in Health
Joe Lumarda, California Community Foundation
Terry Meersman, Talaris Research Institute
Betsy Nelson, Association of Baltimore Area Grantmakers
Miyoko Oshima, formerly of Southern California Grantmakers
Joel Orosz, Grand Valley State University
Francie Ostrower, The Urban Institute
Ed Pauly, Wallace Foundation
Peter Pennekamp, Humboldt Area Foundation
Tom Reis, W.K. Kellogg Foundation
Loren Renz, Foundation Center
Harold Richman, Chapin Hall
Shirley Sagawa, Sagawa-Jospin
Ed Skloot, formerly of Surdna Foundation
Paul Shoemaker, Social Venture Partners
James Allen Smith, Georgetown University
Maureen Smyth, Mott Foundation
Karl Stauber, formerly of Northwest Area Foundation
Vince Stehle, Surdna Foundation
Eugene Tempel, Indiana University
Janet Topolsky, Aspen Institute
Sylvia Yee, Walter & Evelyn Haas, Jr. Fund

This report is dedicated to the memory of Joe Breitenacher, a great leader in the field of philanthropy.

Appendix B. Background on Peer Networking at the Annie E. Casey Foundation

Casey-Coordinated Peer Networking	**Active Design**	**Active Learning**	**Life Span**	**Some Key Activities**	**Some Key Products**
Child Welfare Training Directors Group	Lead	Inside	2005-2006	3 meetings/year for over two years; personal networking	tools for training assessment, engagement tool, best practices
Children and Family Fellows Alumni Network	Lead	Field	1992-now	2 meetings/year, small grants, program committee, coordinator	system for between-meeting interactions, outside evaluation report
Community Foundation Exchange	Involved	Inside	2004-2006	several meetings/year	outside report on Exchange creation and operation
Family Strengthening Awards	Involved	Inside	2000-now	1 meeting/year	Family Strengthening Awards
Language Access Network	Involved	Inside	2006-now	2 meetings so far	draft manual for increasing language access, meeting reports
Leadership in Action Program	Involved	Inside	2004-now	several meetings so far	meeting reports; monograph on LAP program
Making Connections Local Coordinators Network	Lead	Inside	1999-now	several meetings/year	meeting reports
Making Connections Resident Leadership Network	Lead	Inside	2003-now	2 meetings/year	meeting reports
Making Connections Social Network	Lead	Inside	2004-now	several meetings, 6 site visits	3 papers on social networks; toolkit (in development)
National Partners Network	Lead	Inside	2000-now	1 meeting/year	meeting reports
TARC Peer Matching (*PM*)	Involved	Field	2000-now	regular peer matches involving site visits	peer matching reports; included in *Help on the Way* report
United Way Training Program	Involved	Inside	2005-2006	3 meetings/year	meeting reports
Urban Child Welfare Leaders Group	Lead	Inside	1997-now	3-4 meetings/year	collaboration with Pew Commission on Child Welfare
Externally-Coordinated Peer Networking	**Active Design**	**Active Learning**	**Life Span**	**Activities**	**Products**
Casey/CSSP Alliance for Race Equity in Child Welfare	Lead	Field	2004-now	several meetings/year, committees	grantmaking; meeting reports
Lead Program Executives Group	Lead	Inside	2000-now	several meetings/year	meeting reports, short papers
Leadership Development Funder Affinity Network	Involved	Inside	2004-now	2 meetings/year	meeting reports
Long-Term Funders Exchange	Lead	Inside	2003-now	several meetings/year	meeting reports
National Rural Funders Collaborative	Lead	Field	2001-now	several meetings/year	grantmaking, meeting reports
PRI Makers Network	Lead	Inside	2003-now	several meetings/year	website, meeting reports

The chart above is deliberately very compressed in order to display all 19 peer networking activities on one page. It provides an analysis of each activity under the following dimensions:

• ***Casey-Coordinated/Externally-Coordinated*** - is the activity coordinated by Casey and related to one of its internal initiatives, or is it an external philanthropic network of which Casey is just one member? (Internal and External activities are presented in separate sections of the chart).

• ***Active Design*** - how actively are peer participants involved in designing the activities of the peer network or peer matching system?

(All 19 peer networking activities provide some degree of active participant involvement in design of their activities. Those categorized as "Involved" are activities in which participants contribute to activity design, but the coordination is handled by third-party support staff, often Casey staff. "Lead" indicates that participants are in full charge of and lead the activity design, even if there is some support work done by others).

• ***Active Learning*** - to what extent are peer networking activities designed to produce learning through direct experience and involvement in taking action?

(Again, *all* peer networking activities studied have a considerable degree of active learning for participants. Activities categorized as "Inside" base these learning experiences inside the actual meetings of the group; "Field" activities place at least some of the learning out in the field through direct activities of all involved , e.g., through site visits for the two peer matching systems, or grantmaking done directly by the peer network, rather than by funders individually).

• ***Lifespan*** - when did the activity start and when did it end, if it has yet concluded?

(Those still in operation as of this writing are labeled from start date to "now")

• ***Some Key Activities*** - what are some of the major activities of the peer network/peer matching system?

(The activities listed are representative, not comprehensive)

• ***Some Key Products*** - what kinds of products or results have emerged from the peer networking activity?

(Again, these are representative, not comprehensive)

There is only one Peer Match activity among the 19 presented in this chart (TARC Peer Matching) which is identified by the designation *PM.*

More detailed descriptions of the objectives, history and operations of the peer networking activities included in this study follow. A few interpretations from the material presented in this chart include:

(1) Most Casey peer networking activities (11 of 19) have placed participants in the leadership role for designing meetings and other activities.

(2) Active learning for the peer networks takes place mostly within the boundaries of their group meetings, though there is much reason to believe that the learning continues informally when participants are back in their home territories. The exceptions are the two activities in which grantmaking is a part of the peer network's basic organization – in the case of the Children and Family Fellows Alumni Network, these are grants made to network members for small projects they carry out on topics of particular interest; for the Casey/CSSP Alliance for Race Equity in Child Welfare and the National Rural Funders

Collaborative, these are grants made in the community from pooled funds. And of course the two peer matching systems by definition involve learning in the field, since that's where the peers come together!

(3) The most typical peer networking activity is a meeting, and the most typical product of that activity is a written report that is shared with the peers both as a record of what happened and a guide to future actions. But some peer networks are shaping products intended to be shared with the field, in an effort to transfer what's worked about their activities to other foundations or to nonprofits and communities.

Casey-Coordinated Peer Networking Activities

Child Welfare Training Directors Group

This peer network, now concluded, focused on the role of staff training and development in systems reform for child welfare agencies across the country, and on best practice approaches to staff training and development in these systems. It began with a convening in July 2005 of a small group of training directors from public agencies for child welfare, drawn from sites where Casey was already working. This was followed by larger meetings of leaders from all over the country.

The meetings were set up so that participants could talk freely amongst themselves about how to advance the role of training and development on the overall agenda of their agencies. Key questions addressed included: What are the most important aspects of an effective training academy? How can child welfare agency leaders come to see training and staff development as crucial to overall success (this came to be known as "sitting at the big people's table at Thanksgiving," said one interviewee).

This in turn led to discussions about the larger issues of child welfare agency system reform. It also led to discussions about what part staff training and development can and should play in reform efforts.

This peer network was successful, according to a study interviewee, because members were able to convene away from the pressures of their work lives, without having to "do the logistics," and they knew there was good "capacity in the room." The sessions were focused on problem-solving, with an equal mix of teaching and learning.

The last official meeting of the Child Welfare Training Directors Group was in August 2006. In addition to providing another platform for discussion of the above issues, this meeting was structured to reflect the desire of the group to have an "intentional ending." There were a number of rituals, such as certificates of appreciation for all group members, and a celebratory dinner.

At the end of the meeting, it was not clear that anyone in the group will take the lead in continuing it. But there was some evidence from the discussion in August that if there were an outside "instigator," a number of people in the group would be happy to participate in some sort of ongoing activity. This has not yet taken place.

There was general consensus among the group of training directors that the year they spent together in peer networking had value. The group's activities generated several products, which now can be used both within the group and more generally in the child welfare agency arena nationwide: (1) an assessment tool for training academies to use to do performance assessment on themselves, (2) a document to determine whether an engagement can be around training and staff development, and (3) a best practices matrix.

Children and Family Fellows Alumni Network

Since 1994, the Annie E. Casey Foundation has provided one-year fellowships to professionals working in the children and family services field. The program's aim is to facilitate the movement of Fellows into positions of significant influence in their communities and agencies, so that they can increase their ability to have an impact on a large number of children and families. Sixteen new Fellows were announced in January 2007.

The program is supported by publications (both print and electronic) from Casey that document learnings from the Fellowship effort, such as a monograph, *Building Leaders Through Change*. In addition to meetings and informal networking, the Fellows have access to a small grants program which can support small projects they carry out back in their home communities. Applications for these small grants are reviewed and award decisions made by a committee of Fellows.

The Alumni Network was proposed by the first graduating class of Fellows and was created in 1995. There are now about 60 members, who come together twice a year for meetings over a long weekend. It is a combination of "reunion, re-connection and leadership development," as one interviewee put it.

This peer network has a steering committee to set its policy, a coordinator who is a former Fellow, and a "national voice committee" to address issues of advocacy on which the Network might want to take a stance. There are also ad hoc groups concerned with early childhood and results-based accountability (The Annie E. Casey Foundation, 2001).

According to one interviewee, the Fellowship Network "does a good job of making itself visible to itself and to the Foundation, but it has struggled in demonstrating itself and its work to the broader world - people are busy, and the work of this Network is not any of the participants' prime responsibilities." Disseminating information about its process and results remains a challenge.

There is some evaluative evidence about the Network's success. An OMG Center evaluation (Gutierrez, et al, 2005) showed that 85 percentof Fellows found it had contributed to their professional progression, and every Fellow had helped another Fellow at least once. It is a very active system that operates constantly between the actual meetings, with more than 1400 transactions during a recent two-year period. As one interviewee put it, the evaluation revealed a peer network that is "very dense and vibrant," providing input on resources, problem-solving and even information about career development opportunities for the Fellows.

Community Foundation Exchange

This peer network of community foundation executive directors and senior staff held multiple meetings over a two-year period, organized around the central question: "What does it take to be an effective community foundation, especially around advancing outcomes for vulnerable children and families?" It was intended to encourage community foundations to become more actively engaged in community initiatives, especially in *Making Connections* communities.

Meetings included speakers like *Within Our Reach* author Lisbeth Schorr, and a variety of approaches by which the experiences of individual foundations could be shared. Foundation staff participating in this peer network began to connect with each other in what one interviewee termed "personal and deep ways," and began their own informal network for exchanging ideas.

The network was so successful that at the end some of the participating foundations offered to pick up their own costs if Casey would continue to convene the meetings. The process by which this peer network was set up, through the Coalition of Community Foundations for Youth and Chapin Hall, has been documented in a recent report by Chapin Hall (Hamilton, Parzen & Brown, 2004). The learning outcomes of the Exchange have yet to be documented.

Actual impacts include the Milwaukee Community Foundation's refocusing their engagement with the community around family economic success. They acted as a catalyst to bring together a strategy for the whole city of Milwaukee. Another is the creation by the Des Moines Community Foundation of a whole different way of partnering with other community organizations and with donors. This has led to the community foundation being a leader in convening other philanthropic organizations in the region, especially those concerned with outcomes for vulnerable kids.

Family Strengthening Awards

The purpose of the Family Strengthening Awards is to build commitment to family strengthening as a strategy for front-line practice in the human services. Casey's support for this program arises from the assumption that when human service agencies operate from a family strengthening perspective, they achieve better results for vulnerable children and families.

The program is run as a joint venture with eleven national nonprofits, such as the Boys and Girls Clubs of America, Goodwill Industries and the National 4-H Council. Each organization runs an application process through their own national networks to identify potential recipients of Family Strengthening Awards. These awards are given by the national organization to several local agencies with outstanding family strengthening programs. Cash awards of $15,000 - $25,000 (funded by Casey as part of its support for this effort) recognize good programs, and also help cover costs for the winners to offer peer technical assistance for promoting wider adoption of their family strengthening approaches. The national organizations also disseminate information about the winning programs through their networks.

The Awards program brings together national staff members who manage the Awards effort for their organization once a year for several days. The meeting allows them to discuss strategies for promoting family strengthening in each organization's national network, and talk about other emerging topics of interest related to improving services for vulnerable children and families.

Thus peer networking happens at two levels through the Family Strengthening Awards – at the national level with staff of the eleven partner nonprofits, and at the local level through the peer networks each of these organizations has with their constituents. Use of the latter constitutes a significant co-investment by these national organizations with Casey in elevating best-practice examples of family strengthening.

Language Access Network

This peer networking group is focused on learning what can help limited English-proficient children and families have better access to high quality services by removing barriers related to language, and on the specific challenge of reducing the number of children who serve as translators for their parents. These children often don't know what words mean in either language, and putting them in this translator role undermines parental authority and status.

The Language Access Network (LAN) so far has had two convenings, in March and September 2006, and further events are being planned for

2007. The convenings have brought together municipal officials, advocates and others who are early adopters of programs for increasing access to translation services. They also have provided a platform for discussing innovative programs and challenges involved in implementing them.

The peer convenings are a combination of nuts and bolts problem-solving and attention to larger policy issues. One of them is how Casey can support and accelerate government work to reduce language-access barriers.

The September convening presented a number of case examples of good practice. Peers also discussed challenges in managing translated documents in a community so as to make them readily available, e.g., through some sort of centralized database. And they discussed how to evaluate a limited-English proficiency program, how government and nonprofits can partner in this area, and how the media can help.

The convening concluded with a candid discussion about the future of this peer network – should there be another convening, and if so, what form should it take in order to best support action? In the meantime, there is a self-organized listserv that enables LAN participants to communicate with each other. Casey is considering whether an intermediary organization might be brought on board to support further activity, for instance to support efforts in 10 states that may soon be issuing executive orders related to language access.

This is a young field, and while there are already pilots across the country doing this (usually because of recent legislation or a government or mayor decides to take the issue on), most of the work now is being done by municipalities, not hospitals or health care institutions. There are ten sites now involved in the network.

As mentioned, the LAN peer network consists of early adopters, and the help provided both lets them ramp up as innovators and supports them to get through their operational issues and they learn from each other. A longer-term goal is to produce a manual that others can use to improve practice in this area.

For example, some cities have sophisticated telephone systems for language access, but the LAN peer discussions indicate that these are of limited usefulness. So, as one interviewee put it, the discussion now focuses on "how do you help agencies put in place the policies and practices so that people can get served, and how do you get to a conversation about quality, such as agency performance measures?"

Leadership in Action Program

The Leadership in Action Program (LAP) peer network is composed mostly of representatives from *Making Connections* sites across the country. LAP was formed in 2004. It is oriented to the implementation of results-based leadership development programming (a five-phase process from engagement, to site readiness, implementation, maintaining momentum, and achieving scale and sustainability).

The LAP peer network's individual members are leaders from state and city governments, nonprofit organizations, businesses and faith organizations. Who comes from a particular site depends upon the particular focus of the *Making Connections* effort (e.g,. in Maryland the topic is school readiness, so the participants are Head Start coordinators, parents and business leaders; while in San Antonio, where the focus is on Family Economic Success and the participants are concerned with economic issues, including issues in the medical arena.

An outside consultant documents the LAP meetings. One monograph, also created by the consultant with input from the peer network, has been published; it addresses leadership development and the work of the LAP program.

***Making Connections* Local Coordinators Network**

The local coordinators are paid staff consultants of Casey who work with each of the *Making Connections* sites on the ground, helping to lead and manage various aspects of the community change initiative at each site. While there were previously independently-scheduled meetings of the Network, the local coordinators now get together for a separate peer network meeting each time the *Making Connections* sites are convened, usually for a lunch or dinner after the monthly "joint operations" meetings have concluded.

This separate time allows them an opportunity to concentrate on issues specific to their job roles in a peer-to-peer atmosphere that encourages candor and good problem-solving. The Network has been in existence since the beginning of the *Making Connections* implementation phase, and provides a vehicle for skill development and learning for these site coordinators.

The local coordinators convened separately for the first time at their own request because they wanted to learn from each other how to best perform their job role. By the end of this first meeting, they had (with support from Casey staff) defined a constructive learning agenda which has since set the frame for their subsequent meetings. The Technical Assistance Resource Center (other work described elsewhere in this report) collaborated with Casey's Leadership Development unit to help create meeting activities that would address this agenda.

Over the last 18 months, as the *Making Connections* sites have been addressing the transformation of this initiative into locally-led operations, including a sustainability strategy after the Casey funding has ended, the local coordinators have been focused on this challenging new set of demands. This is the main reason they decided to meet only when some other purpose was bringing them together. Casey also may suggest that the Network be convened along with the new leaders, part of the Local Management Entities (LMEs) in most sites, so that the next generation of leaders can benefit from their experiences.

***Making Connections* Resident Leadership Network**

In *Making Connections* (and the related Civic Sites Investments program), residents play a significant role in community and family strengthening. The Network enhances their capacity to do so, providing problem-solving and leadership development opportunities a well as content learning (e.g., about what makes a difference in helping families to get jobs). Its purpose also is to help Casey understand more deeply the role residents play in foundation initiatives, as well as to develop and deploy talents of residents.

The *Making Connections* Resident Leadership Network began in 2003, bringing together 25 residents from across the sites for a two-day advisory meeting. The meeting agenda focused on how residents see themselves involved in the making of change, and what they would like Casey to know about how to have maximum impact in their communities.

According to a study interviewee, "It was a powerful experience for both residents and the Foundation." Input also was provided on how to plan additional meetings of these individuals, and the residents made it clear they wanted more meetings – that a "one-shot" learning experience would not be of great value.

From the first successful experience a peer network evolved. Although residents always were involved in planning meetings, a major step forward occurred in 2005 when residents became more active on the design team for structuring these meetings, as they had requested in a 2004 cross-site meeting. Casey's goal is to reach the point where the residents constitute the design team, but get necessary consultation from Casey staff on structure of their Network experiences.

The Network focused first on skill development for individual resident leaders to facilitate meetings and take on other leadership responsibilities, using interactive exercises and other methods. More recently, the meetings have shifted to an emphasis on helping resident leaders learn how to influence deeper, more structural change in their communities, e.g., through advocating for public policy change.

The Network now meets twice a year for three days each time, with some 60-80 residents attending. Each cross-site meeting agenda and process are created by a meeting design team which is 2/3 residents and 1/3 Casey staff. Residents facilitate the meetings. Local coordinators, who are Casey consultants on-site in each *Making Connections* community (see above) also are invited to attend these meetings, as are senior Foundation officials and others involved with community site work.

There are challenges in the design of these meetings, including, as stated by one interviewee, "issues of power, race and class and how they impact foundation-resident relationships," as well as those between residents, leaders of local nonprofits and elected officials in the community. These often are issues of power differentials as well as cultural differences.

There are also practical concerns, such as how much commitment to the Network is feasible, given the circumstances of residents' lives (residents live in disorganized communities, which increase the unpredictability of their lives; also, participants in this Network typically are highly engaged community advocates who have many other volunteer responsibilities). The issue of how to compensate residents fairly for their participation in this activity also has been raised.

While there was consideration given to setting up a national network steering committee, including residents in an external decision-making body, the Foundation decided again to increase the size of the design team so that all communities are represented, and to request that several well-known community leaders provide some overall guidance to the future direction of the Network and of the *Making Connections* effort as a whole.

Making Connections Social Network

Following a literature review done on social networks (Bailey, 2005) and a careful developmental process, a peer learning network on social networks was created in 2005 to assist the *Making Connections* initiative in promoting the healthy growth of social networks at its community sites. A social network is defined as a sustained effort to build and support cooperative and interdependent relationships in community, woven together but open to allow for ease of access and freedom of movement.

The *Making Connections* initiative was launched with a theory that called for connecting families with economic opportunities, to social networks, and to effective services and supports. Together these three types of "connections" could strengthen families and help them raise their children. In operational terms, initial emphasis in sites was often on connections to economic success, and specifically on re-connecting people in dis-invested communities with economic opportunities. As the initiative completed its fourth year, Casey staff decided it was essential to focus more explicitly on how sites could develop positive social networks, or enhance those already in place (including what the role of the Foundation should be in offering TA related to Social Networks).

The Social Network brings together *Making Connections* site personnel to deepen attention to this topic. As stated by one interviewee: "We want to hear from the community – tell us about your experience of social networks, how we can create more robust networks with more benefits to give in relation to improving quality of life in your communities."

Initially, Casey staff mostly listened to sites' experiences and needs. Then they obtained additional input by identifying intermediary organizations that have strong track records of success in social networking formation, such as the Family Independence Initiative in Oakland, Community Organizing in Chicago, and Beyond Welfare in Ames, Iowa. All six were site visited, and then leaders of the six intermediaries were brought together for a Social Network meeting in October 2005.

A framework for social network formation emerged from this meeting, and current activities of the peer network are focused on creating a "toolkit" for local use. Then the effort will be "going deep" at two *Making Connections* community sites (Louisville and Denver), to test the toolkit and the overall concepts of network formation. More meetings of the Social Network also are planned, and other sites will be brought on line to use the toolkit.

Challenges of social networking in the *Making Connections* environment are being explored candidly as part of the peer network's activity. For instance, different kinds of relationships need to be developed across barriers of class and power to make the social network inclusive and effective. Over time, it also will be important "to obtain evidence between positive social networks and the quality and quality of overall results," as one interviewee expressed it.

And the membership of the social network needs to be defined in terms of organizations with power in the community as well as individuals. "We want to map the environment and look at all types of networks in the community, to look for natural connectors," said one interviewee. This will make possible a "network of networks approach," which is already being tried in the Denver site.

National Partners Network

This group consists of the CEOs of large national nonprofits like the National 4-H Council and United Way, all with a common interest in helping disadvantaged families succeed. Collectively, these organizations represent local organizations that deliver much of the help and support vulnerable families receive. The goal of the National Partners Network is to get good family strengthening practice more widely implemented, and through this leadership group, to create new paradigms for promoting family strengthening and family economic success.

The Network meets annually. The first meetings were around individual organizations' work, but now the peer network concentrates on broader issues that are important to them all. The members are thought leaders in each of their fields nationally. They say there's not another place they can come together to talk candidly about issues like tax policy – in addition to the focus of these meetings on family strengthening core concepts and programs, which they can then transfer to the local organizations they represent.

They are also interested in coming to the meetings because it is an opportunity to engage with the senior management at the Annie E. Casey Foundation . Some of the resulting peer networking is quite personal. For example, Don Floyd CEO of 4-H, and Brian Gallagher of United Way get together for breakfast because they found out through these meetings that Gallagher's home is near the 4-H offices in Chevy Chase.

TARC Peer Matching

The Technical Assistance Resource Center (TARC), a Casey-funded activity based at the Center for the Study of Social Policy (CSSP) in Washington, DC, has been offering peer matches to *Making Connections* community organizations since 2000. TARC also does peer matches for other Casey initiatives, such as the Civic Sites.

Peer matches offer structured opportunities for teams of people working on similar issues to exchange experiences and practical knowledge. When TARC receives a request for peer matching, a standard process is used to determine whether the issues presented are a good fit, and if so a facilitator is selected to prepare and guide the peer matching process. Selection variables include whether local stakeholders are invested in working to achieve a common objective, the timing is right for significant change to happen, and that people involved in the match have the power to act on what they learn.

The peer participants co-design the intervention, setting forth what results are to be achieved and the process to be followed. A written report is prepared on outcomes, with follow-up about results achieved. A site visit from a set of peers in one or more geographical areas to another is often a part of this process.

Initially, the peer matching process was quite informal, but TARC has learned that preparing for the peer exchange is critical. The peer interaction is focused on a particular challenge that has been identified in advance. To learn about this challenge, TARC staff "don't take what people say at face value, but rather determine what they really want to achieve, see what people need to get there, and then re-frame the learning objectives accordingly," said an interviewee.

A lot of the success of this system comes from "making sure you have the right people involved in the peer match," in the words of one interviewee. This means "getting the folks who are the key decision-makers and the key thinkers –– they need to be able to absorb and digest and put the information to good use." But it also means getting a diversity of participation, especially from community residents.

As an example, the Jacobs Family Foundation and its Market Creek project in San Diego welcomed groups from Atlanta to look at the group ownership model Market Creek had successfully developed. Other recent peer matches include groups going from Louisville to Chicago (the topic was public housing), Camden to Baltimore (development of East Baltimore), and Atlanta to Baltimore (community revitalization).

Sometimes the result of the peer match is that the potential adopter community decides against replication. For instance, when the site visitors from Camden, New Jersey came to visit in Baltimore, they quickly learned that the level of resources required to replicate the Baltimore program was too high for what was feasible in Camden.

The peer TA process is consistent with the principles of adult learning theory. Learning activities concentrate on real-world need, learning occurs in a safe environment, and participants are pushed to think outside the box so that the learning outcomes can be improved. As one interviewee put it, "the main challenge is creating the container for the work that makes a level playing field for each participant, so they can get to the heart of what they need to learn about and take action on. These people are usually on the dance floor all the time, so to speak, and they need to come up to the balcony" – to get a larger perspective on their work by looking at other communities.

Dozens of peer matches have been completed that bring together peers involved in two or more *Making Connections* sites. This work is summarized in CSSP's 2005 report *Help on the Way* (which also discusses other CSSP peer matching work).

Considerable data gathered over several years by Community Development Associates indicates that the TARC peer matching system and the TA it facilitates can have powerful impact, especially when it is part of a larger comprehensive community change effort. The Community Development Associates assessment of peer matches made in 2002 found that 100 percent of respondents indicated overall satisfaction with their participation in TARC's peer matching

This ongoing assessment also has revealed that what makes peer matching work also makes it cumbersome – unless people are convinced they'll get a good outcome they may be reluctant to invest in this more structured process. And this way of doing peer matching TA is expensive – there may be as many as 8-12 people coming from one community to another, as well as a facilitator, and TARC has made a policy of paying a stipend to all who participate. The level of demand for these TA consultations has been great, so that TARC has constantly been "behind the curve" in fulfilling requests for TA in a timely way, a problem which TARC staff are attempting to resolve.

TARC created a performance management group to examine customer satisfaction and TA outcome data, so that the ongoing process of peer matching can be improved. Both TARC variables (such as the amount of training facilitators have received) and community variables (degree of community resident participation in the peer matching activities) have been assessed in this process. .

United Way Training Program

This executive education program was developed to get the family strengthening agenda more broadly understood and adopted. The targets of the United Way Training Program were rising leaders in local United Ways – a senior staff person and a board member in each agency, identified by local United Ways that were invited to participate.

United Way personnel were targeted because their organizations undergird health and social services in many communities through being a major funder. A United Way/Casey partnership for this training program was feasible because United Way had already started a systems change agenda of its own, and had been considering this type of leadership development/change agent approach.

Each participating senior staff person and board member participated in the Annie E. Casey Foundation/United Way Family Strengthening Fellowship, operated through the Kennedy School of Government at Harvard University. The group of Fellows met three times a year for two years and then more informally. Topics covered at the Program sessions included personal leadership, strategic leadership, being a change agent and the substance of family strengthening approaches.

The Training Program has now ended. However, Casey's partnership with United Way continues on a number of levels, mostly focused around United Ways located in the *Making Connections* sites.

Urban Child Welfare Leaders Group

This peer network pulls together commissioners or directors of child welfare large urban systems. Collectively, the Urban Child Welfare Leaders Group represents more than 50 percent of all children in care; the members are high-powered and politically astute, and they come to almost every meeting. The Group has been successful because, according to its participants, it is the one place they could all go where they were "truly among peers," to have a safe place to talk about the challenges of running a complex child welfare system in an urban setting.

There is no consultant to facilitate the meeting; the agenda is set by the group, and Casey provides needed support for meeting topics selected (e.g., a presentation from researchers in a topical area, such as older youth aging out of care). After these presentations, invited guests depart, so the leaders can talk amongst themselves (Casey staff, one of whom is a former Group member, remain).

There are 20 members at present, and they include now both deputies as well as commissioners for some agencies. The group has three to four meetings a year. They also plan one meeting a year jointly with the Pew Commission on Child Welfare (a recent meeting includes judges from each system that is part of the Group, and representatives from the National Center on State Courts). The group feels that their major impact comes from getting the systems with the most kids together several times a year to feel supported and connected and to facilitate change in their systems. Pew has suggested it will co-fund some deeper examinations in 2007 of court reform, a topic the group already has addressed. Some other details about the Group's operation are presented in the case example at the beginning of this report.

As with all peer networks, one of the challenges is that the learning and inspiration provided by the group is difficult to translate back into an intractable system at home. Peer members often feel they lack the tools for change needed to make it happen, and in particular that they don't have access to the resources that real systems change would require.

A shift in the Group's leadership has occurred recently. David Sanders, former child welfare commissioner in Los Angeles, is now vice-president for systems reform at Casey Family Programs, expressed interest in co-facilitating this peer network. A partnership between the Annie E. Casey Foundation and Casey Family Programs, its philanthropic "sister organization," has resulted. This joint administration may have some significant impact on the Group, though its basic operation as a peer network is likely to remain the same.

Externally-Coordinated Peer Networking Activities

Casey/CSSP Alliance for Race Equity in Child Welfare

Also known as the "disproportionality initiative," this peer network consists of the Center for the Study of Social Policy and the "family of Casey philanthropies" (The Annie E. Casey Foundation, Casey Family Programs, Casey Family Services, Jim Casey Youth Opportunity Initiatives and the Marguerite Casey Foundation). Other members include the Race Matters Consortium and Black Association of Social Workers.

The Alliance is aimed at bringing a stronger voice and visibility about racial equity issues in child welfare at the national level, both within the philanthropic and public policy communities. It has been in operation a little more than two years, and has several peer networking retreats a year, to which some 60-70 people come.

The Alliance was created because of mid-level managers in the Casey philanthropies deciding it was needed, and then "bubbling up" to senior managers who had to approve the funding (some of whom are now getting involved directly on the group's steering committee). It has succeeded better than any other inter-Casey effort, according to one interviewee, because the peer network "successfully side-stepped turf issues" (e.g., what is the dollar amount of investment and is mine equal to yours?).

The Alliance also has five committees with eight to 12 people each. It is in these committees that the real work gets done (committees are structured around policy, practice, communications, research and data). The philanthropies involved have been pooling dollars into a pool administered by CSSP, funding grantees approved by the Alliance steering committee. Also, a scan of best practices concerning racial equity in child welfare was undertaken, which identified some promising sites that can serve as models for other communities. One larger observation is that African American children end up staying longer and getting deeper into the child welfare system than their white, Latino or Asian American counterparts, even when risk factors like poverty are controlled.

The group recently decided to experience the anti-racism training of the Peoples Institute in New Orleans, which was a very personal experience and this produced bonding. In fact, personal relationship building is what holds this group together. For instance, each meeting starts with "gallery walks" where participants are urged to put up photos or other ways of sharing recent events in their personal lives.

The purpose is to get to know each other as people first (like having food together) - this produces more and more purposeful agendas about what it would take in the child welfare field to achieve race equity (there is not a lot of research about what works). However, the group is now facing the challenge of determining whether this highly participatory approach will work as well when there is more decision making and more organizational structure as the peer network grows. Also, there are issues to be worked out among the peers, e.g., impact of differences in the number of staff assigned to racial equity issues.

Lead Program Executives Group

Composed of foundation executive vice-presidents (or equivalent job titles), including those from some of America's largest and most visible foundations, this group convenes several times a year to explore the unique leadership and operational issues these "chief program officers" face in their jobs. The changing membership of the group reflects numerous transitions in who occupies these positions at foundations like Kellogg, Packard, Robert Wood Johnson and Annie Casey. Typically 8-10 members attend any given meeting.

Casey has provided administrative support for this network, and Kellogg financially supported the first gathering. For each meeting, one member takes responsibility for shaping the agenda with input from others. Both content issues (poverty, homelessness, etc.) and administrative or grantmaking matters are discussed, as are "relationship matters" with respect to foundation CEOs and trustees.

Sometimes outside resources are commissioned, such as a series of short papers on emerging issues in philanthropy. There are occasional invited speakers, such as for a presentation on Communities of Practice at the June 2006 on-line meeting.

In an expanded 2003 meeting held on Arizona's Camelback Mountain, and thus dubbed the "Camelback Conversation," 35 additional lead program executives were invited to join the original 11. Advance input on the invitees was gathered by McKinsey & Company pro bono consultants, and the conversation was focused on critical success factors for foundations in the dramatically changing philanthropic environment of the 21st century. Much of the discussion centered on the need to clarify strategy and focus, and the need to manage foundation performance and results.

As with many peer networks, challenges have arisen which tested the viability of the group. For instance, the membership includes several lead program executives from smaller foundations, whose job responsibilities are somewhat different than those of their colleagues from large philanthropies, and programming has needed adjustments to reflect this diversity. The larger meeting described above was intended to produce "spin-off" networks of other foundations, but that did not happen. One of the Lead Program Executive group meetings in 2006 was postponed, and then reduced from an in-person meeting to a telephone "webinar," which brought into question whether members are still committed to participation. Also, a proposal earlier in the year to put together a funding consortium to deal with post-Katrina issues did not happen.

Now there is an organizational shift in the making, with a request to the Council on Foundation's executive education group to take on the responsibility of organizing these meetings (they could, for example, be held during the Council's annual national conference, or tied to other Council activities). Inevitably, that would change their character, though whether the result will be positive or negative remains to be seen.

Leadership Development Funder Affinity Network

Initiated in 2004, this group is operated by the Leadership Learning Community (a national nonprofit oriented to people who run, fund and study leadership programs). It is an affinity group independent of the Council on Foundations, so they can have deep, candid conversations among the 30 or so foundations that are part of the group. For instance, one recent topic was leadership development for emerging leaders.

The group provides a safe space for reflective practice; everybody is busy, and this is a chance to process experience with others in similar roles. One of the issues in this group is that there is a core membership of about 15 who come to all the meetings and are very active, but there are another 15 members whose attendance is more sporadic, with resulting challenges for group cohesion and efficiency. The group meets twice a year, once in the Spring at the annual meeting of the Leadership Learning Community, and once in the fall.

Collaborative work often emerges from these meetings as well. Usually this happens by hearing someone discuss a similar mission and vision, leading to a "sidebar" conversation about forming a working relationship.

Long-Term Funders Exchange

This is a group of foundations which fund long-term community change initiatives, meeting to discuss (a) the assumptions, forces and objectives that drive such initiatives, and (b) practical matters such as site partnership approaches, results-oriented management at the community level, and the challenge of managing expectations and risks within the foundations. Capacity building within sites, sustainability and documentation and knowledge management regarding such initiatives also were identified as priority topics. Four strong themes emerged from the first four meetings of this peer network: (1) a shared commitment to community engagement as part of an initiative; (2) a focus on results and a commitment to collecting and using data; (3) the importance of identifying pre-existing "platforms" in the community (community organizations, individual leaders or intermediary organizations) to support the change effort; and (4) the importance of policy advocacy to the success of community change.

In addition, at each meeting participants grappled with process issues. For example, there was attention to how to balance meeting time used for updating each other (what one interviewee called the "show and tell" function, valuable but not sufficient in itself to keep these leaders engaged) and focusing in-depth on a few issues of common interest (sometimes aided by a case study).

The participants in the first four meetings of this peer network were staff of the Annie E. Casey Foundation, Northwest Area Foundation, John S. & James L. Knight Foundation and Robert Wood Johnson Foundation. In 2005, the conversation was broadened to look at long-term initiatives of Atlantic Philanthropies and Palm Beach County Children's Services Council, with staff from both invited to join the dialogue. Chapin Hall served as coordinator for the Long-Term Funders Exchange over its first several years, supported by consultant Leila Feister.

In mid-2005, the Exchange was at a turning point. The group's leaders met to review its status and concluded that a stronger focus on ending persistent poverty was needed, driven by a solid national policy framework and developing human capital in the form of livable-wage jobs for people in these communities. To make progress on these revised priorities, the Long-Term Funders Exchange has morphed into the Funders' Exchange on Community Change, Poverty Reduction and Prosperity Promotion. In Summer 2006 coordination for this group was taken over by the Aspen Institute, and a meeting of the group in Aspen focused on this new orientation.

Robert Wood Johnson Foundation and Knight Foundation are no longer part of the group. Casey and Northwest, the remaining "founding members" of the original peer network, are now its sole funders. Membership in the new group is evolving, to permit recruiting those foundations and individuals within them that are most interested in the new focus on reducing poverty and promoting prosperity. The next Funders' Exchange meeting is likely to be at a site where a member foundation has work underway, to promote learning from those actually doing the work "on the ground."

National Rural Funders Collaborative

This peer network, formed in 2001, consists of CEOs and program officers from 12 national and regional foundations with an interest in rural communities, to help these funders learn about what makes for effective philanthropy in rural regions, and to pool funds for support in these areas. Babcock, Ford, Northwest Area Foundation, Kellogg, The California Endowment and Heron are among the member foundations.

The National Rural Funders Collaborative operates primarily as a funding pool, intended to channel philanthropic resources to reduce poverty in rural areas. There also is a good deal of peer to peer learning among foundation staff who participate, focused on the specific issues of providing philanthropic support in rural environments. A recent peer learning meeting discussed policy issues and also brought together local leaders, functioning as a "giant consultative session" in Casey's terms, as an interviewee put it.

The Collaborative now has an ongoing infrastructure with offices in Dallas and an executive director and staff, who coordinate the above activities. The peer network takes the form of a Steering Committee, which acts as the decision-making body for NRFC. Each participating funder (National and Regional) has a seat at the table with additional representation from on-the-ground partners and grantees), as well as partnering Federal Agency representatives. The learning activities of the Collaborative also include a learning network that is website-enabled.

The Collaborative is a ten-year, $100 million initiative. It has become more intentional and successful since local leaders were included in the network, in the opinion of one interviewee. The major frustration of the group surrounds the amount of time devoted to the mechanics of the pooled funding, which leaves much less time for funder-to-funder learning.

PRI Makers Network

Several years ago, Casey hosted a consultative session of other foundations that use Program Related Investment (PRI) approaches as part of their overall philanthropic strategy, to help the foundation in initial development of its own social investing strategy. This activity has helped to inspire creation of the PRI Makers Network, a project of the Neighborhood Funders Group, which has been partly underwritten by Casey.

Casey's internal work to develop its PRI activities have included efforts to educate Casey staff about social investing in general and PRIs in particular. Publications presenting basic information about the concept of PRIs were commissioned, and Casey staff traveled from site to site providing individualized education and consultation. This was helpful because dealing with PRIs is time consuming, with multiple steps required in the process of due diligence, investment decision-making and structuring the PRI.

Casey's efforts have been shared through its participation in the developing PRI Makers Network, and its membership in this peer network also has helped Casey refine its approaches. The PRI Makers Network is now an independent peer network of foundation staff concerned with PRIs, and includes both basic and advance training on the subject, plus a PRI activity database which is being created in partnership with the Foundation Center. Initiated in 2003, their third annual conference was held in January 2006.

Acknowledgments

This two-year study began in discussions with Ralph Smith about transformational change in foundations – how large, staffed foundations go about making changes in their overall philanthropic strategies. As described in the study report, this led to a focus on peer networking at the Annie E. Casey Foundation. Ralph provided the key intellectual inspiration for this study from beginning to end, along with important input from his Casey colleagues, Ira Barbell, Tom Kern and Frank Farrow. Christina Lyerly, Caryl Mellott and especially Marci Weiner provided invaluable assistance in coordinating complicated schedules and handling the administrative aspects of the project at the Casey end. Production of this report was coordinated by Connie Dykstra and Steve Presbury of the Foundation's Strategic Communications department. At the HIRI end, administrative and research support were ably provided by Beth Howard, Terri Ruddiman, Kate Groves and Sue Koone.

Four important opportunities for sharing the preliminary findings from the study in group settings were provided in July 2006 at the Annie E. Casey Foundation's Senior Management meeting; in July 2006 and January 2007 at meetings of the Senior Consultants Group, a peer network of experienced organizational consultants the author has belonged to in Los Angeles for some years; and in February 2007 at a gathering of staff at the Center for the Study of Social Policy.

Most of all, thanks are extended to the interviewees for this study, both Casey staff and thought leaders in the field of philanthropy and organizational change. Their contributions were essential both in understanding peer networking and transformational change, and in thinking about how the results of this study might affect philanthropic strategy in the future.

About the Human Interaction Research Institute

Founded in 1961, the nonprofit Human Interaction Research Institute conducts research and provides technical assistance on the challenges of change in the nonprofit sector. The Institute works closely with government and foundation funders of nonprofits, helping develop grantmaking strategies, facilitating dissemination and implementation of innovations, and evaluating both the process and outcomes of systems change.

For more than 20 years the Institute has studied philanthropy from a psychological standpoint – exploring how to improve its operations, and how to integrate donors and foundations into the work of community change. Current research includes a study of how advisors to wealthy donors help them shape a philanthropic strategy, and a study of lessons learned from evaluations of foundation grantmaking focused on nonprofit capacity building. The Institute also provides back office support for a family foundation's grantmaking initiative on nonprofit capacity building, as part of a larger program of research on this subject (which includes maintaining the world's largest database on foundation capacity-building grantmaking and services).

Past projects for the Annie E. Casey Foundation include studies of stakeholder involvement in philanthropy, collaboration approaches for small foundations, and individual donor strategies for funding capacity building. A current project focuses on development of a manual and intervention for helping public mental health agencies implement an evidence-based program for involving Spanish-speaking Latino families in mental health services.

The Institute has long investigated methods for improving diffusion of results from foundation grantmaking, as reported in its book, *Dissemination and Utilization Strategies for Foundations: Adding Value to Grantmaking*. These methods have been applied through long-term interventions with large foundations such as the James L. & John S. Knight Foundation, Ewing M. Kauffman Foundation, The California Endowment, and The California Wellness Foundation.

A psychologist, Institute president and study author Dr. Thomas Backer has written widely on philanthropy, and has been a member of the International Network on Strategic Philanthropy. He also is Associate Clinical Professor of Medical Psychology at UCLA Medical School.

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