



ACTIVITIES REPORT 2015

Community Democracy in Action

The necessity of democratic community action to confront and solve many of the problems of America is part of our spirit, folklore and reality as a nation. From 19th century New England Town Hall Meetings to the Civil Rights Movement and to issues of the present day; stories, documentation, theory and research demonstrate citizen efficacy where government, service providers and business fall short. Yet support for the engagement of democratic practices by communities, while never more needed is ever less apparent by those who hold positions of power. This is all part of a larger pattern in America leading to growing pessimism by most Americans for their communities and the nation's future. It is part of the cause and growth of inequality.

At the moment, and in spite of a recovery from the Great Recession, these are not the best of times for most people, particularly people of color. An energetic economic recovery has mostly led to the accumulation of greater wealth by the already wealthy. While at the same time, wages have remained stagnant and forecasts into the future do not foretell any broad improvement in circumstances anytime soon. The middle class continues to shrink as poor and working people remain powerless and voiceless in matters of civic importance to them. For people approaching retirement most will not have put away enough financial resources to meet basic needs. Even as wages stagnate the productivity of workers continues to rise as they work longer and harder.

The share of income distribution average working people lost in recent years didn't just disappear into thin air. The country continues to embrace economic policies where the wealthiest people receive the greatest incentives (mainly through tax cuts) and invest little in growing an economy that benefits everybody. Simply put, it has been a colossal failure for poor and working people. Huge and growing government debt resulting mainly from the tax cuts to the wealthy is threatening the continued existence of crucial services and supports at the very time they are badly needed. Add on to that, opportunities for ordinary people to make their views known and influence policies through various forms of civic engagement are being replaced by undemocratically installed governments.

At the core of what Community Democracy Workshop seeks to achieve through combining powerful ideas and community knowledge with community power and capacity is the idea that communities can create and insist on well-reasoned and sincere partnerships with powerful and well-resourced institutions, including government to build momentum for sustainable and more equitable community change.

-Garland Yates



ACTIVITIES REPORT 2015

The centrality of organized residents in this partnership is well documented and the roles that residents must play in revitalizing and changing their communities are, if not self-evident, proven by experience and research. Within the last year, Community Democracy Workshop (CDW) took on these challenges in several ways.

- A. CDW started working and/or continued working in several communities that test and demonstrate basic CDW assumptions about both the specific practices and benefits from authentic community engagement. Following are some examples of CDW collaborations and supports to these community change strategies.
- The central thrust of the Ford Foundation in Detroit is closely aligned with the fundamental mission and purpose of CDW. CDW Senior Fellow and Managing Director Garland Yates is consulting in support of the Foundation's efforts to examine the premise that an adequately supported Resident-Centered Civic Engagement strategy can result in a more robust and inclusive Post-Financial Management recovery process in Detroit.
 - With the Annie E. Casey Foundation as a supporting partner, CDW is working on a methodology and strategy as well as tools for developing a cadre of Senior Community Democracy Fellows dedicated to coaching and mentoring future generations of Community Democracy Practitioners.
 - CDW helped the Winthrop Rockefeller Foundation (WRF) in 2015 to assess the potential for building institutional and community partnerships in Central Little Rock neighborhoods that embrace the centrality of an authentic resident leadership voice as a core element in the neighborhood revitalization process. CDW also supported local WRF grantees in Jonesboro and Springdale, Arkansas as they strive to develop local approaches that embody authentic resident engagement strategies.
 - CDW is working with the Learning and Evaluation Department of the California Endowment to research and increase both knowledge and application of community democracy practices in local communities throughout California. For example, CDW is coaching, mentoring and helping build connections with Pillars of the Community, an almost entirely volunteer organization grounded in Islamic faith, committed to embracing and celebrating the historic, rich and diverse culture of South East San Diego. Pillars strive to counter the criminalization of the community through community organizing, leadership development, and strategic partnerships. As one of the only organizations in South East San Diego, Pillars role as a staging ground for civic engagement is growing with vitality.



ACTIVITIES REPORT 2015

- CDW is collaborating with the Kettering Foundation to explore the links between philanthropy and community democracy.
 - A CDW Summer 2015 National Meeting was hosted and supported by the Ford Family Foundation in Roseburg, Oregon. CDW's national meetings bring together community democracy practitioners from communities across the country with philanthropy to jointly identify and solve problems at the intersection of supporting and practicing community democracy. The national meetings also serve to refine CDW's directions and priorities.
 - CDW Senior Fellow Peter H Pennekamp is in the second year of helping the California Community College Research and Planning Group (RP Group) think through the role of community engagement in improving student success, and the structural questions both for colleges and communities resulting from that consideration.
 - In partnership with Philanthropy Northwest, CDW led a workshop with Washington State Community Foundations designed to sharpen their knowledge about why and how to engage more with residents as part of their program development and grantmaking processes, particularly in the areas of community building and community change.
- B. In the fourth year since the very beginning of research and national conversations that led to the founding of Community Democracy Workshop in 2014, CDW made good progress in transitioning from a pilot to an organized national effort under the umbrella of Philanthropy Northwest, in Seattle.
- Key CDW partners reached agreement on a strategic direction for 2015-2017 that calls for a more robust approach to helping institutions, including government work more effectively in partnership with communities to tackle basic and essential problems.
 - CDW adopted a partner-engagement mandate to organize partners with similar interests into small action-oriented working groups. In each instance a core group of partners will provide the impetus and energy for the evolution of the working groups by being the leadership force for recruiting new partners.



ACTIVITIES REPORT 2015

- CDW identified and recruited people to serve as CDW Senior Fellows. The CDW Senior Fellows will also serve as a leadership group. The day to day work of CDW, including fund development and overseeing CDW operations was delegated to a managing director and a co- director.
- Key CDW partners are currently organized into two main groups, although there is much blurring of the lines:
 1. Funding partners who mainly provide funding support, such as the Marguerite Casey Foundation and The California Endowment, and
 2. Action partners of institutions and individuals, including government and philanthropy with whom CDW is engaged with in some aspect of their community democracy or civic engagement work.
- CDW began work in earnest to build a technology platform to help maximize the strategic use of social media. The first stage to building the kind of technology platform needed is to build a CDW website capable of supporting that platform and maximizing the dispensation of strategic communications to partners and the broader community change field. The website is in the final stages of development.

CDW's primary achievement during 2015 was to expand, clarify and engage our vision, mission and purpose to support resident-centered community change strategies. At the core is the creation of learning opportunities that reveal lessons about topics and issues related to the equitable revitalization of neighborhoods and communities across the country.