

Coming Together to Support a Healthy Public Sector: The Work of The Communications Collaborative

Who We Are

Because communications is so central to the effort to support policies and programs that promote healthy families and communities, The Communications Collaborative (The Collaborative) was formed. The Collaborative, a project of Grantmakers Income Security Taskforce (GIST), Grantmakers for Children, Youth & Families (GCYF) and Grantmakers In Health (GIH), is a network of grantmakers representing national and regional foundations interested in coordinating investments to build communications capacity in the field. Although many foundations are currently investing in strategic communications support for their grantees, no centralized hub exists to unite policy and advocacy groups, facilitate shared information, resources and peer learning, and bring “what works” to scale. **The Collaborative is engaged in a series of activities to help build the capacity of state policy and advocacy networks to develop and use effective messages around the essential role of government.**

Why We Exist

The recent recession and slow recovery has left the economy weak and unemployment rates high, leaving many families struggling to make ends meet. States continue to face historically large fiscal challenges and the ongoing national debate over debt, deficit reduction and budget and tax decisions means that federal and state governments will face decisions to cut crucial public services and raise revenues. These decisions are made even more challenging in this current environment, where the role of the public sector is being denigrated, with inevitable ripple effects into the philanthropic sector and the services to the children, families, and communities that they support.

Philanthropy and the public sector are partners in the work to improve communities and provide opportunities to vulnerable families. The current attack on the public sector puts all of our investments in danger.

Public services, structures and systems are an essential foundation for a healthy economy where opportunity and prosperity are broadly shared. Supporting adequate public resources to meet the needs of families and communities is essential to ensure the best outcomes for the specific issues with which we are concerned.

In previous times of national crisis – The Great Depression and World War II, for example—our collective support of a healthy public sector led to critical investments in communities and families and pulled us together as a nation. Today, philanthropy has an unprecedented opportunity to positively influence federal, state, and local policy and practice to build a healthy public sector, and create positive, long-term outcomes for families and communities.

Why You Should Join

Several opportunities exist to take action and get involved. By joining The Collaborative you can:

- 1. Participate in monthly standing calls and a private listserv** to discuss and exchange information on investments and communications strategies.
- 2. Promote the use of larger narratives by your grantees** that connect specific issues (quality child care, access to health care, job training, etc.) to national efforts to support vulnerable families and communities and effectively make the case for public services, systems and infrastructure and the revenue needed to sustain them.
- 3. Plan a briefing at your foundation** to share key new communications framing research and discuss what the foundation staff can be doing to shift public perception about the role of government.
- 4. Consider opportunities for new or coordinated investments to build the communications capacity of state-based grantees.**
 - Offer communications boot camps, institutes, and/or trainings to your grantees.
 - Jointly fund the development of case studies that would be packaged into a report that could be easily shared with the philanthropic field.
- 5. Map your investments individually or collectively to identify opportunities for coordination.**
 - The Collaborative has developed a geographic tracking spreadsheet and analysis to help illustrate to funders where investments are being made in policy, advocacy and collaboration work in the states, and to assist organizations in more easily determining how and with whom to coordinate in their states or regionally. To date, contact information on key groups that national initiatives and communications firms are working with has been collected from 17 sources. You can add information about your grantees here.
 - The Collaborative is also developing a tracking sheet to map foundation investments in strategic communications. You can add information about your investments here.

6. Participate in a coordinated rapid response fund to facilitate the quick dissemination of targeted funds to state groups engaged in key communications battles.

- Join the EITC Rapid Response Fund. This fund is administered by GIST, the Hatcher Group and Center on Budget and Policy Priorities and has awarded nearly \$70,000 to support communications and advocacy in MI, WA, KS, and OK.
- Explore possibilities for formalizing a state fiscal threats rapid response fund. A member foundation has seeded this by providing \$25,000 general support grants to six states (AZ, OK, IA, WA, NH, and NC) based on work they are doing to educate policymakers and the public about fiscal policy threats that would undermine economic security for vulnerable families and public support for human service and education programs.

Current Communications Collaborative Members

- Ali Webb, Program Officer, WK Kellogg Foundation
- Ami Nagle, Co-Director, Grantmakers Income Security Taskforce
- Andrew Gatewood, Program Officer, The Kresge Foundation
- Anna Wadia, Program Officer, Quality Employment, Ford Foundation
- Benita Melton, Program Officer, Charles Stewart Mott Foundation
- Bonnie Howard, Director, Annie E. Casey Foundation
- Cema Siegel, Co-Director, Grantmakers Income Security Taskforce
- Cuong Hoang, Director of Programs, Mott Philanthropic
- Dana Linnane, Policy Communications Manager, WK Kellogg Foundation
- Ianna Kachoris, Program Officer, The MacArthur Foundation
- Jann Jackson, Senior Associate, The Annie E. Casey Foundation
- Lynda Parmely, Program Director, Hagedorn Foundation
- Marilee del Pra, Program Director, Virginia G. Piper Charitable Trust
- Marta Conner, Program Officer, Wellspring Advisors
- Mike Laracy, Director, Policy Reform & Advocacy, The Annie E. Casey Foundation,
- Natacha Blain, Associate Director, Grantmakers for Children, Youth & Families
- Nicole de Beaufort, Director of Communications, WK Kellogg Foundation
- Osula Rushing, Program Director, Grantmakers In Health
- Robert Shull, Program Officer, Workers' Rights, Public Welfare Foundation
- Sandra Ambrozy, Senior Program Officer, The Kresge Foundation
- Shelley-Waters Boots, Senior Consultant, Annie E. Casey Foundation
- Stephanie McGencey, Executive Director, Grantmakers for Children, Youth & Families
- Teri Langston, Consultant, Open Society Foundation