

***Power of We Consortium***  
**Meeting Minutes**  
**May 20, 2011**

**Present:** Randy Bell, Janine Sinno, Holly Madill, Kate Nault, John Roy Castillo, Teresa Kmetz, Kelly Young, Phil Knight, Heather Rae McAlvey, Joan Nelson, Alex Bryan, Harriett Dean, Renee Canady, Graham Pierce, Bill Nelton, Christina Harris, Dominick Quinney, Tiffeny Jimenez, Angela Waters Austin, John Melcher, Peggy Roberts.

**Welcome, introductions and announcements:** Co-chair Angela Austin opened the meeting and announced the receipt of a grant from the WK Kellogg Foundation of over \$900,000 for three years in support of Birth To Work, a partnership between the *Power of We Consortium* and MSU.

### **Action Item**

*Inter-organizational networks such as the Power of We Consortium provide a means through which communities can systematically plan how to address important social issues. However, networks are difficult to develop and much harder to sustain. Community leaders and administrators of public and non-profit agencies operating within a community have a responsibility to continually work at building and sustaining the network if it is to be successful. Examining the quality and functioning of the relationships through an objective and systematic process can assist a network in understanding how network relationships are functioning and evolving. Understanding this information can enhance a community's capacity to combine diverse knowledge and skills to come up with effective solutions to complex community problems.*

*Tiffeny Jimenez is a doctoral candidate in MSU's Ecological-Community Psychology Department and is working under the supervision of Hiram Fitzgerald in University Outreach. Tiffeny is proposing to conduct a networks system analysis of the PWC. Tiffeny will describe what a system network analysis is, what level of participation would be requested of the PWC membership, and the potential benefits for both the university and the community. Following discussion, the PWC will consider its approval to support Tiffeny in this analysis.*

Angela introduced Tiffeny Jimenez with an explanation that Tiffeny has worked extensively with both Angela and Peggy in learning about the Consortium and its many committees, coalitions and organizations. Angela suggested that research by Tiffeny can help the Consortium think about how it can be more effective in transforming systems.

Tiffeny provided a one-page handout delineating her proposal for a [systems analysis](#) of the Consortium. An analysis can help learn about resources, how to re-direct those resources for the largest impact, and to map out who is working with whom. This study will be grounded in scholarship and will require the participation of the membership by way of survey completion, and in some cases an interview. Renee commented that this study is an opportunity to identify our accountability for sustaining the Consortium, and why it continues to be important for each of us to get to the Consortium table on a regular basis. Joan commented that she supports the study as a way to learn about being good collaborators. And Janine offered the recent study by the Land Use and Health Resource Team as supportive documentation.

Following discussion, Joan Nelson made the motion to support Tiffeny's research study of the *Power of We Consortium*; Alex provided the 2<sup>nd</sup>; motion was approved.

### **Dialogue for Collective Impact**

*Health is not just about healthcare and healthy behavior. The environments we live in impact our health. What shapes those environments? Who gets access to healthy housing, clean air and water, places for physical activity and relaxation, green space, safe work conditions and neighborhoods, and fresh, healthy food? Who does not-- and why? Jessica Yorko, Environmental Justice Coordinator for the Ingham County Health*

*Department, will lead us in a discussion about the policies, systems and environments that create or the contribute to the conditions that require our services. We will also explore ways we can collaborate with each other to change policies, systems and environments that create environmental injustice.*

Jessica Yorke, Environmental Justice Coordinator for the Ingham County Health Department, provided a visually dynamic PowerPoint presentation and discussion identifying the many facets of environmental injustice including the location and structures of low-income housing, food deserts, toxic sites, red-lining practices, lack of tenant-rights organizations, unhealthy outdoor air quality, limited transportation options, etc. All of these factors impact overall health. Numerous links to online groups can provide additional information including: The Reinvestment Fund; Communities of Opportunity; Detroiters working for Environmental Justice; Californians for Pesticide Reform; Healthy Homes University; Greenation, etc.

Consortium participants were asked for comments/reactions:

- Glad to hear the word “race” used in the presentation. Too often it is left out of the discussion and shouldn’t be.
- Information similar to that of the documentary series “Unnatural Causes”
- Used to have tenant rights organizations in our area; need to keep it alive and sustain the work.
- This information broadens the idea of “health”. Need to give people who are most affected a voice
- Maps used in the presentation are a great visual for our area food deserts.
- Access to healthy foods is not enough – are also issues for storage, ability to purchase, etc.
- Use of EBT cards at farmers’ markets is skyrocketing in this area
- Engaging people into this conversation who have not yet been engaged is critical. Need new voices.

A sign-up sheet was passed around to each table for people to sign-up to receive future information and/or to have Jessica speak to their organization/group.

Consortium participants were asked to talk about the emotions they feel about this discussion topic:

- Issue is so complex – it requires a “both/and” approach. By accepting the complexity we must give up on knowing the answers, and we need to find hope in the fact that we can form a better whole out of the sum of the parts.
- We need to organize, empower and mobilize, with empowerment being the critical piece.
- Public conversations need to become even more public.
- We must recognize that we have so little choice based upon our lot in life.
- Legislators need to hear this conversation
- It’s not the responsibility of just one organization to “move the needle” on these issues but requires all working together
- Why aren’t we any better at this issue of environmental justice, after all this time? It starts personally, then collectively. It’s messy and painful.
- It doesn’t matter where we start – just dive in and work. Allow it to become messy, until order arrives
- All issues are interrelated. There has been good progress on the food systems issue in the last few years as an example. The more people craft their own solutions, the more they own the outcomes, and the more successful they are.
- Some people don’t know they live in a food desert, so they can’t advocate until they know about alternatives
- Let people know the breadth of opportunities that could be....

The conversation was continued in small table discussions addressing the question of identifying ways to go “upstream” to create policy system and environmental change. Comments that were reported back to the whole included:

- Many challenges are guided by status quo funding
- Some programs are not making a difference. We need to face up to that and redirect those resource funds.
- Empowerment conversations are critical to move us closer
- Find an issue model that did work in our community (ex. creation of the Ingham Health Plan) and use it to guide our future efforts around another issue
- Bring marginalized people into the middle – how to do that?
- Systems are so “set”. Try to step out of them to see opportunities for change
- Change incentive structures within organizations responsible for specific change
- Follow John McKnight (community organizer), author of “The Abundant Community”. Create a 3 column plan: 1) Things we can do all by ourselves; 2) What do we need a little help to do?; 3) what do we need to do as a coalition? The first column usually amounts to 80% of the total. We chronically underestimate what we can do by ourselves and not depending/waiting on others.
- Need to get the right info to the right people
- “Policy” is often just “culture” and not necessarily set in stone. Challenge it – change it.
- Use our data wisely and bravely to advantage, despite other sectors that might be negatively impacted
- All are responsible, but no one does it all by themselves
- Organize
- Use media – educate them so there is ongoing support
- Re-distribute resources when true impact can be made; someone will lose resources while others gain.
- The authentic voice of those most affected must be at the table.

**Next meeting of the *Power of We Consortium*: Friday, June 17, 2011, 1:30 – 3:30 pm.**