

Introduction of the Innovation Grantee 6.21.12

by Cindy Shurtleff, member, 2012 WWF Innovation Grant Committee

This was my second year on the Innovation committee, and we struggled initially with how we wanted to define Innovation. Once our team explored the idea of awarding a grant to an individual that we felt embodied the qualities of a grass roots leader, our search turned exciting as we identified outstanding individuals that are leaders in their respective communities and, in our winner's case, dedicated to inspiring and training others to follow in their footsteps.

I am pleased to announce that we have chosen *Lupita Ayon of Latinos for Community Transformation* for the \$15,000 2012 WWF Innovation Grant recipient.

We were inspired by our winner's honesty, persistence, humility and style of leading by example.

Lupita is a Latina immigrant, who became a leader when her daughter was struggling in school, and she witnessed the reality of a failed education system. In a group of similarly frustrated parents, and as a single parent, she decided to take action and founded Para Los Niños in 2003 to foster academic success for every Latino student through parent and community engagement. After several successful years, she felt what the Latino community *really* needed to empower itself was **leadership**.

So in 2008 she started Latinos for Community Transformation, a non-profit project that empowers communities from the ground up by training leaders via a *Leadership Academy* for social change in their communities. Substantial projects are required of all participants. So far there are over 100 graduates.

What motivates Lupita: In her own words, related to the failure of education for children: *"It is easy to write or to talk about numbers and statistics, but it is not easy when you have to put a face to those numbers and statistics. It is harder when you know the faces and even worse when that face is someone you love."*

We love that Lupita dreams that a grant like this would allow her to evolve some of her own skills as a leader, and hopes to improve her writing and public speaking skills, learn more about program evaluation.

Lupita wants to continue to develop the *Latino Higher Education Resource Center* at Highline Community College, which seeks to increase higher education access, persistence and achievement for Latino families in South King County. And she wants to update the curriculum of the Leadership Academy to continue to cultivate leaders such as herself.

Underneath this soft spoken exterior, is a woman with a passion for helping others to help themselves. She understands that leadership is very individual, and she takes it as a personal mission to mentor others as they search for their own style of leadership. When she gets discouraged or frustrated, she touches base with someone she has trained and takes heart from the good work that person is doing.

We were charmed by Lupita, with proven successes under her belt, and big dreams for the future, and plans to achieve those dreams. We have the confidence that Lupita will continue to inspire new leaders and wish Lupita every success with our Innovation grant.

Other Community Leaders considered by the Innovation Grant Committee

Vu Le might be best known for his work as the director of the Vietnamese Friendship Association but what intrigued us most about him was his ability to build an effective coalition to close the achievement gap in Southeast Seattle - called the **Southeast Seattle Education Coalition**. SESEC has a goal to have all schools in their area be rated as a level five by 2017 and their slogan is *All fives in Five*. Linking a wide range of community organizations in a very multicultural community is essential to achieving better education outcomes. The other partners in this coalition are Filipino Community of Seattle, Multicultural Educational Rights Alliance, Horn of Africa, Campana Quetzal, Urban Impact, as well as the Vietnamese Friendship Association which also serves as the fiscal sponsor. One key component of this coalition is that none of the leaders are funded to do this work and yet this kind of building bridges work is very time consuming. Vu Le also pointed out that there are very few capacity building opportunities for funding burgeoning organizations at this first rung of development and this kind of award is truly exciting because it focuses on potential.

Michael Woo also told a very personal story about his journey as a young adult during Seattle's last great recession in the 70's when he struggled to find work in the construction field while raising a young family. Since then Michael has devoted his life's work to employment equity among communities of color and worked for various organizations like United Construction Worker's Association and King County Regional Justice Center and as well as work as a journeyman plumber for many years. More recently in 2008, he founded Got Green, an organization that leads community organizing efforts, public policy, and leadership development programs to ensure that the benefits of the new green economy are widely available to low income communities of color in Seattle, King County and beyond. Michael is getting ready to retire and is methodically planning how to mentor and train the next generation of leaders in his field. He spoke to how he would use his award towards the leadership transition for **Got Green** and how it would enable him to refocus rather than retire. Stress was a big part of his message to our group (and it came up in all our interviews) , and

how this award would enable him to transition personally into full time advocacy work and prepare talented new leaders for the operations and program work for Got Green.

Paulina Lopez is a true grassroots community leader who recently received the Latino Heritage Award from Mayor McGinn. Paulina Lopez is trying to bring more Latino involvement by creating a cohort of Latina women who could step up in the neighborhood. Her work is done in coordination with the **South Park Information and Resource Center**, whose mission is to empower people by connecting them with resources. Paulina has launched an empowerment program for women called Project ALAS, which believes that empowerment, academic preparation, and leadership training will increase women's overall well-being, job and educational opportunities, community connections, collaborations and solidarity in the community. She is targeting her own neighborhood, South Park, and is working in partnership with One America and Circulo de Mujeres, as well as Latino for Communities for Transformation, which you will hear more about later.

Suellen Mele's statement focused on her work with **Zero Waste Washington**, a small and effective grassroots organization where Suellen has been the program director for nine years and is one of only two staff. Her organization protects people and our natural world by advocating for products designed and produced to be healthy, safe and continually recycled and reused. They are the public voice of zero waste in our state. Suellen demonstrated passion and strong leadership for the issue area and gave us hope for the possibility of replication beyond WA. Suellen wrote about the impressive achievements of Zero Waste Washington and their vision to be innovative by preventing waste by design rather than managing it all the end of the pipe. The first two did not go forward for the interview despite being very impressed by their work.

Here are some terrific resources on the topic of 'Innovation.'

Steven Anderson: *Innovation: Beyond The Buzzword* (video lecture)

<http://groundwire.org/events/event-recaps-and-resources/innovation-beyond-the-buzzword-video>

Steven Johnson: *Where Good Ideas Come From* TED Talk (also book of same title)

http://www.ted.com/talks/steven_johnson_where_good_ideas_come_from.html

Grantmakers for Effective Organizations: *Investing in Leadership*

By Betsy Hubbard

http://www.geofunders.org/storage/documents/investing_in_Leadership_v1.pdf

Richard Evans, *Innovation: Connecting to a New Era of Arts Participation*

<http://www.arts.wa.gov/community/innovation.shtml>

Chronicle of Philanthropy, *In Boston, a Fund Seeks Promising Nonprofits to Tackle Social Ills*

<http://philanthropy.com/article/A-Boston-Nonprofit-Imports-Top/131500/?key=Qz8nJV89ZnFEMHowMGtCZzxUbnw7M0J7YSBKOSkgbltQFA%3D%3D>

Chronicle of Philanthropy, *Searching for Solutions: One Fund's Approach to Finding Top Charities*

<http://philanthropy.com/article/Searching-for-Solutions-One/131498/?key=Sz16J1FoYitNYHhlyZGZWwGPSBtMUwgYnsdYn8kbl5WGQ%3D%3D>

Wall Street Journal, *You Call That Innovation?*

<http://online.wsj.com/article/SB10001424052702304791704577418250902309914.html>

Innovation Grant Committee Process and Findings

Outline of 6.21.12 presentation by Mary Stevens, Member Lead, 2012

I'd like to tell you about our process and also share with you some of the interesting tidbits we heard or read along the way about innovation. We were all excited to embark on new funding territory while building upon some of what this committee experienced last year.

- 1) Collective recognition of how hard this work was
 - a) Not as cut and dry as the other new grant initiatives
 - (a) Diversity, International
 - (b) Needed to define huge concept of innovation for ourselves; then within that broad definition, eventually force ourselves to make some decisions about the specific parameters so that we could move forward; and do the legwork to find a worthy grantee
 - b) Member definitions of innovation
 - (a) Pushing the boundaries, risk-taking, different approach, untested, untried, nimble, bold
 - c) Hunger for discussion around the issue – some things that came up:
 - (a) A desire by some for something revolutionary – but within the time-span of a few months!!
 - (b) Resistance to repeating what was done the year before: every committee can set their own direction to a degree (time-frame, check to 501 C 3, one woman one vote, etc.)
 - (i) Tendency toward techno-philanthropy – next generation giving feels innovative (Laura Arrillaga-Andreesen, Giving 2.0)
 - (ii) Crowd funding, Donors Choose, \$10 philanthropist, Kiva, etc
 - (iii) it's almost not innovative anymore
 - (c) Some discussion about level of risk – consensus that failure was not necessarily a bad thing
 - (d) Innovation is not necessarily a destination; it's making new connections that leads to stronger outcomes (Arts)- vertical rather than horizontal
 - (e) The comment of “hmmm...great project, but is it really innovative?” came up a lot
 - (f) Maybe we don't give out a grant this year?!
- 2) Disseminated videos and articles about innovation
 - a) Some of the conditions conducive to innovation (per points in Steve Anderson/Steve Johnson videos)
 - (1) **Slow hunch** (not a Eureka moment; fade into view; internet took 10 years)
 - (2) **Adjacent possible** (The Fosbury flop: possible because someone else created the foam landing pit. Someone else's reach into the unknown illuminates new areas for all of us.)

- (3) **Connecting vs. protecting** (put ideas on the table; let others stitch them together)
 - (4) **Edge of chaos** (*between* stability and chaos)
 - (5) **Errors and failures** (failure often breeds creativity)
 - (6) **Beginners mind** (Inversion - Green Light Foundation)
- 3) Two ways to be innovative: Process *and* Product
- a) Process: i.e. Put a problem out there to be solved - City of Birmingham
 - i) Over 1,000 entries from around the world
 - ii) A lot of people are thinking about it (“liquid network”)
 - iii) Some of us would have loved to do something like that – ended up with a process new to WWF
 - b) Finding innovative product or solution more complex – intense research needed (meaning time and money)
- 4) Areas of exploration
- a) Innovation was important and our charge, but we couldn’t ignore **need**
 - i) Geographic focus – need in great in South King County (SKC)
 - ii) Caren Adams, Regional Health Educator for King County Public Health
 - (1) SKC Very diverse – high level of childhood poverty
 - (2) Many refugees – low graduation rates
 - (3) Population moved but services didn’t; community capacity is critically important
 - b) Narrowed down social focus (aligned with geographic) : social justice/immigration; community development/economic opportunity; leadership development/ youth development
 - i) **Leadership** rose to the top
 - ii) Mini “McArthur” or “genius grant”
 - (1) Russell Foundation Jane’s Fellowship program: \$20K stipend and leadership training over 2 yrs. to 10 grassroots leaders; very complex and resource intensive
 - iii) **Discretionary funding** – allow for ideas, inspirations, connections to percolate; already recognized as leaders doing exceptional work
- 5) Process for finding leaders
- a) LOI’s from larger grant process that didn’t make it to full proposal stage
 - b) Consult with others working on issues and funding in SKC; received nominations from them
 - (1) Advisors (unofficial partners): Judy DeBarros – Neighbor-to-Neighbor of Seattle Foundation, Lori Guilfoyle – New Solutions of United Way of King County, suggested names and organizations in SKC
 - c) Do our own individual research (community newspapers, web search, conversations with colleagues, etc.)
 - d) Left latitude for members to introduce leaders working outside of SKC
 - e) Did most of those things and reported back in traditional way
 - i) Narrowed down to 5 leaders

- 6) What were we looking for in a leader?
 - a) Grassroots – bubble up from within the community
 - b) Building healthy community (able to respond to its own needs)
 - c) Developing future leaders – creating ripple effect
 - d) Community connectors
 - e) ‘Investments in Capacity’ grid from “Grantmakers for Effective Organizations”
 - i) Investment in individual to build the capacity of staff of an org. to be more effective in their jobs
 - ii) Build capacity of community residents to serve in leadership roles
- 7) Didn’t have a formal “Request for Proposal”
 - a) Instead, short personal statement

If you were to receive a discretionary grant of \$15,000, how can you imagine spending that money in a way that would strengthen and further your work as an innovative community leader?

- i) All three finalists interviewed mentioned how innovative that was (and what a relief)
 - b) Then we narrowed to three leaders & had 45 minute interviews, instead of traditional site visits
- 8) Final conclusion
 - a) Our process was innovative with respect to other WWF granting
 - b) Grantee is open to trying new approaches but also has a stellar track record
 - c) Can be seen as Catalyst Funding

Post-script: Rockefeller Foundation: Investing in People

Lessons Learned about Human Capital Development (which I believe closely relate to chosen candidate’s style of leadership)

- Training that takes place in the context of the individual’s real-world circumstances allow lessons to be more relevant
- A premium must be placed on flexible styles of training
- Human capacity-building efforts must be done in parallel with organizational capacity-building efforts (*theoretical down to practical*)
- Important to build skills among second-tier management or even entry-level (*chosen candidate was mentored while in an entry-level position – There’s an understanding*)
- Build evaluation in from the start (*something our grantee mentioned in the interview without prompting*)