

**Partnering for Progress: Building a
“Different Kind of Collaborative”
in Prince George’s County**

Launching in early 2008, The Partnership for Prince George’s County (“The Partnership”) will connect the people who live, work, learn, and play in Prince George’s to each other and the larger region. The region’s grantmakers will pool their funds to strengthen the County’s nonprofit community, and the network will build strategic alliances among County stakeholders.

“Everyone in the funding community says Prince George’s County is different. I’ve heard it for years,” says Carolynn Mambu, director of public policy with **Washington Grantmakers**.

Tucked between the Potomac and Patuxent Rivers to the east of Washington, D.C., Prince George’s County has more than 800,000 residents—and yet for years, Washington Grantmakers’ members had received almost no grant proposals from the county’s nonprofits. “Our funders had no idea what was happening there,” says Mambu. “Who were the leaders? What was the best work being done?”

Last year, along with the Prince George’s Community Foundation (PGCF), Washington Grantmakers set out to answer those questions. Its **Sustainable Communities Working Group (SCWG)** organized a series of five forums to bring together local nonprofit groups, the faith community, business leaders, and funders to get an overview of the county and the issues facing it.

An Emerging Picture

Through the five forums and discussions with local leaders, a picture of a complex county began to emerge.

Over the past 20 years, Prince George’s has changed from a network of agrarian towns to a “bedroom” community of Washington, D.C. Its population has grown by more than 20 percent, and shifted from

predominantly white to 62 percent African American—with one of the highest shares of middle class black residents in the country, according to the Brookings Institution.

There’s no doubt that Prince George’s residents are civic-minded. The county has some 25,000 active nonprofits, but most are of the “mom and pop” variety—a PTA group collecting winter clothes, a congregation running a soup kitchen, a neighborhood after-school program.

In fact, only about 400 of these nonprofits have annual budgets over \$25,000, according to the county’s Human Services Coalition—which means most lack the capacity or know-how to tackle formal grant applications, or to consider longer-term community-wide interventions.

That’s why the Partnership will be more than a funding collaborative—it will also be a network through which county stakeholders can build relationships and advocate for better policies.

The Eugene and Agnes Meyer Foundation recently made a \$150,000 3-year leadership grant to help the



(l-r) **Carolynn Mambu** (Director of Public Policy, Washington Grantmakers), **Karen FitzGerald** (Sustainable Communities Working Group Chair, The Meyer Foundation), and **Desiree Griffin Moore** (Executive Director, Prince George’s Community Foundation), planned and led the 2006 learning series that would become The Partnership for Prince George’s County.

Partnership get underway. “This is about more than putting funding into the community,” says Karen FitzGerald, Meyer Foundation program officer and Chair of the Washington Grantmakers SCWG. “We want community leaders to actually be able to participate in the decision-making process. That’s going to take some capacity building and organizing.”

The Partnership’s first task is to help the region’s nonprofits work together to attract larger, longer-term, private funding, and to advocate for more strategic use of existing government funds. In 2008, the Partnership will offer grants ranging from \$5,000 to \$25,000 to do just that.

Good Timing for Tough Work

The Partnership is not the first effort to bring together the county’s disparate and diverse nonprofit sector. Jerry Adams directs the Human Services Coalition (HSC), a membership organization formed in the late 1990s to connect local nonprofits. In recent years, HSC has struggled to find its footing, with yo-yoing membership and funding.

In 2006, HSC recruited Adams to help grow the organization, and as it turned out, the timing couldn’t have been better. His first day on the job was September 26, 2006—the same day Washington Grantmakers and PGCF held the first of the five forums.

“My colleagues said, ‘Hello. Welcome. You’ve got 30 minutes to get to a Washington Grantmakers forum down the road,’” Adams says. “That forum was the most perfect introduction to a job I’ve ever had. It was fantastic to see how this county views itself, and what they were trying to do.”

HSC immediately signed on to help build the Partnership and to reach out and encourage local groups to get involved. Adams calls the dual efforts—HSC’s revival and the formation of the Partnership—a “confluence of two perfect rivers at the right time.”

“The Partnership has evolved into the perfect vehicle for the County’s nonprofit community to collaborate with foundations, government and business on critical issues affecting the sector and the community. We are delighted to forge this new partnership with Washington Grantmakers.”

– **Desiree Griffin-Moore,**
Executive Director, Prince George’s
Community Foundation

Bringing Mom, Pop, and the County’s “Uncle Sam” to the Table

If there is a third “perfect river” in the scenario, it is County Council Member David Harrington. By all accounts, he has been a proponent of the Partnership—which may prove critical to its success, and to the goal of getting a more strategic use of government funding flowing to local groups to address community needs.

The September 2007 meeting illustrates Harrington’s support. Of the roughly 60 attendees, at least 15 represented different services to youth—a youth obesity program, a program on healthy choices around sexuality and substance abuse, a program to promote discipline through boxing, and so on.

Harrington had some advice for this group: when possible, work together. “All of you are saying, ‘I don’t have any money.’ When you come individually, everyone gets \$5,000 and you can’t do anything with it,” he told them. “But if some of the youth service providers here today collaborated on related issues, I could give you \$30,000 and together you would have a greater impact on the county’s youth.”



David Harrington
Vice Chair, Prince
George’s Cty. Council

This is exactly what the Partnership hopes will happen. “Connecting local groups to each other, and to county government and to private local funders is a major goal of our work,” says Tamara Copeland, president of Washington Grantmakers. “If we can influence where the dollars are going, where power is, that’ll be huge.”

Local buy-in is essential. As Mambu notes: “We’re not coming in saying we know how to do this better than anyone else, we’re just trying to help move the collaboration forward. In the forums, people would stay for an extra hour after it ended. They really wanted this opportunity to meet each other. It’s got to be local—and it is.”