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# Lessons in Building a Better Community, One Voice at a Time

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Silicon Valley Community Foundation is located in the heart of the San Francisco Bay Area and is a short drive to the campuses of companies like Google, Facebook, and Apple. Companies like these have made the region a leader in the global economy and a hub of innovation. The region is home to a diverse population of more than 7.3 million people, a number expected to grow by 2 million over the next 25 years (Silicon Valley Community Foundation, 2010). Where will these people live and work? What impact will they have on our air, water, open space, commute time, and climate?

These were some of the questions the community foundation was grappling with as part of an extensive community input process that began in 2007. In that process, the community foundation brought together hundreds of leaders from government, academia, nonprofit, business, and philanthropic institutions to discuss ways in which the community foundation could bring its full range of approaches, besides grantmaking, to bear on an issue to maximize community impact. At the time of the merger that created Silicon Valley Community Foundation, the board of directors envisioned the organization would have a large enough presence to be a true force in triggering social change by sharing knowledge, raising awareness, and galvanizing support for issues of local concern; convening private- and public-sector leaders in the region to share ideas and identify solutions; and initiating policy discussion on the county, state, and national level. In

## Key Points

- By 2035 there will be an estimated 1.2 million new jobs and 900,000 new households in the San Francisco Bay Area (Association of Bay Area Governments, n.d.); without planning and management, this population increase will result in rising air pollution levels, climate change, escalating cost of living, increasing traffic, and less green space.
- Silicon Valley Community Foundation partnered with area nonprofits and government agencies on a two-year initiative, Envision Bay Area, to engage residents and community leaders in conversations about growth.
- At a series of 10 public forums more than 800 participants came together, including those who were fully on board with walkable communities near transit, those for whom high-density urban centers hold zero appeal, and everyone in between. About one-fifth of the participants had never attended a regional planning meeting.
- The community foundation developed an interactive web-based simulation tool to provide graphic illustrations of the various ways in which a city or community can grow, from a continuation of suburban sprawl to high-density, inner-city growth.
- This article examines what Silicon Valley Community Foundation learned about engaging new voices and the challenges that can occur in public debates over something as critical as what kind of community to create.

fact, the very structure of the merged organization reflects this with a department dedicated to community leadership work.

*The community foundation also learned that while land-use planning is geared toward improving a community's quality of life, local residents – particularly those who are low-income, are immigrants, or are people of color – are often disengaged from the planning process.*

Despite the recession, there have been far more jobs than housing units in Silicon Valley. Since 1980, the area has seen a 45 percent increase in jobs, while the housing supply increased only 24 percent (Silicon Valley Community Foundation, 2010). This imbalance drives up an already high cost of living and pushes workers who cannot afford homes into outlying areas many miles from their jobs. Instead of vibrant, diverse communities with a range of housing and employment options, the shortage of affordable housing fuels crushing commutes, which drive up greenhouse gas emissions and leave many workers with little real connection to the communities where they work or live.

The community foundation also learned that while land-use planning is geared toward improving a community's quality of life, local residents – particularly those who are low-income, are immigrants, or are people of color – are often disengaged from the planning process. Local governments – along with developers, planners, and other public agencies – typically design growth plans without much public engagement despite requirements that they incorporate public input. They often work hard to engage the public, but fail to do so successfully. Furthermore, many community-based organizations lack the technical knowledge inherent to land-use and transportation planning or the understanding of

best practices. As a consequence, plans often do not have well-informed public input. This lack of public participation in the creation of plans for community development can have significant and lasting impact because these plans are typically set for 10 to 20 years and drive most, if not all, of a community's public investments and physical growth.

#### *Mandating Sustainable Growth Plans*

In 2008, the California State Legislature passed SB 375, which tied state transportation money to land-use decisions by requiring the creation of “sustainable” regional-growth plans. The intent of the law was to reduce transportation-related greenhouse gas emissions by expanding efficient public transit and encouraging transit-oriented development.

The community foundation recognized that it had a unique opportunity to help shape local and regional planning efforts and to encourage residents to get involved in the design of their communities. Because of this and as a result of the community-input project, the board of directors approved as one of its five grantmaking strategies “building sustainable land use and transportation plans to secure the future of Silicon Valley and its residents” and awarded the first grants under this strategy in August 2009. This decision was reached after considerable discussion by the board about the potential impact the community foundation, with its relatively small grantmaking budget, could have on such a major issue. Staff also recognized that the public must be willing to make some personal and community choices that align with regional and local land-use and transportation decisions. These choices required understanding, dialogue, and ownership based on accurate information, education, and engagement.

This was the impetus for Envision Bay Area (EBA), a two-year strategic initiative designed to help residents and community leaders make informed decisions about the growth and development that will shape their future environment, the economy, and everyday life in their communities. EBA aligned well with the community founda-

tion's existing investments in local and regional planning. It also offered an opportunity to play an expanded leadership role beyond engaging donors and making grants. Consistent with its institutional values, this leadership role included bringing a diverse set of people together to address a challenge (e.g., how we would grow as a region), presenting them with a range of options based on facts, and engaging them in the decision-making process. Because of this, EBA was fully supported by senior management and the board.

The cost of the initiative was \$762,000; partial funding came from a \$300,000 grant through the John S. and James L. Knight Foundation's Community Information Challenge, a \$24 million, five-year effort encouraging community and place-based foundations to play a greater role in informing and engaging communities. Silicon Valley Community Foundation, private foundations, government, and an individual donor provided additional funding.

EBA was structured using a venture-philanthropy model developed by one of the community foundation's parent institutions. The model includes the creation of a multiyear plan, a system of accountability for results, the provision of grants and expertise, and a dedicated staff person who actively collaborates with nonprofit and government partners and manages the effort until explicit goals are met.

This article provides a detailed description of EBA and the important results it achieved. It also examines what the community foundation learned about the challenges inherent in public debates over something as critical as what kind of community to create.

### What We Set Out to Do

Silicon Valley Community Foundation saw the Envision Bay Area initiative as an opportunity to expand and solidify its role as a community leader. Rather than relying solely on grantmaking to solve the complex problems related to how to grow as a region, EBA allowed the foundation to use digital technology, community dialogue, and news media in a cohesive strategy to equip

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policymakers and the public with information to make better decisions. The proposed goals for the initiative were to:

- Build a web-based graphic simulation tool for the San Francisco Bay Area that would allow users to accurately and easily visualize the critical linkages between land use and clean air, water consumption, public health, energy use, and greenhouse gas emissions. The simulation tool would allow users to see how various growth scenarios impact the things they cared about.
- Provide programming through San Francisco Bay Area's public broadcasting stations, KQED public radio and KQED Plus public television, to help residents learn about and understand how smart growth, livable communities, and climate change are connected.
- Hold five convenings to explore the growth scenarios and transportation options in local jurisdictions and across the region. The convenings were to be timed to coincide with local and regional planning efforts that were under way and prior to critical decision points.

*The community foundation and its partners knew that for information to be actionable, it had to be communicated in a way that was easy to understand and relevant to people's lives.*

In order to achieve these goals, the community foundation hired an initiative officer who was well versed in government structure and collaborative partnerships as well as regional planning. He had a high level of technology literacy and strong project-management skills, all of which were important and were augmented by convening, public outreach, and communication skills of other community foundation staff members.

### Design Phase

Recognizing that community leadership of this scale requires collaboration, the community foundation partnered with a number of organizations to make EBA a success. Nonprofit partners Greenbelt Alliance and TransForm are two of the San Francisco Bay Area's largest advocacy organizations focused on protecting natural and agricultural lands from development, improving the public transportation system, and creating walkable, bikeable communities. Northern California Public Broadcasting is the parent organization for KQED and KQED Plus.

At the core of EBA was YouChooseBayArea.org, an interactive, web-based simulation that was in development for nearly a year before it went live on March 9, 2011. The community foundation and its partners knew that for information to be actionable, it had to be communicated in a way that was easy to understand and relevant to people's lives. As Stuart Cohen, executive director of TransForm, noted,

This process was meant to take a step back from all the statistics – which we typically lead with – and instead engage people with their values and then show them the consequences based on their values. We saw this as a way to engage new constituencies. (FSG Social Impact Advisors, 2011, p. 1)

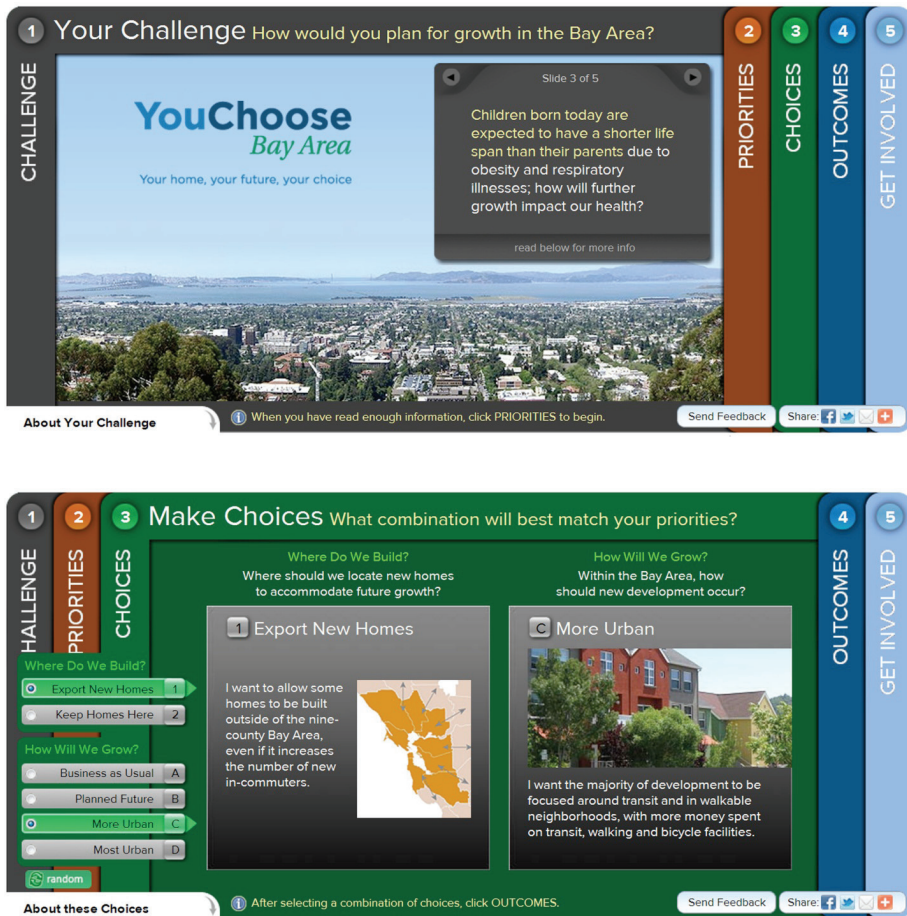
A technical team was established consisting of a community foundation initiative officer and representatives from Greenbelt and TransForm as well as two consulting partners, Calthorpe Associates (a San Francisco Bay Area firm widely recognized for its innovative leadership in urban design, community planning, and regional growth strategies) and MetroQuest (a Canadian-based firm specializing in the development of digital engagement software to support planning initiatives).

Development of YouChooseBayArea.org was a complex undertaking with two distinct parts: a visually appealing, easy-to-navigate website and land-use scenarios based on quantitative data for the nine-county San Francisco Bay Area. The scenarios were produced using the Rapid Fire Modeling Tool developed by Calthorpe Associates. The model is a spreadsheet-based tool into which data and research-based assumptions can be loaded (e.g., baseline and projected growth figures for population, households, and jobs) to test the impact of land-use patterns on air quality, carbon emissions, household energy and water costs, city finances, and the health of community residents and workers. Four scenarios were produced, ranging from “business as usual,” which accommodated new growth through sprawl, to “most urban,” which accommodated all new growth through infill and redevelopment in existing urban areas.

The scenarios were presented to the public through the YouChoose Bay Area website, which was created by MetroQuest. The interactive website allowed users to select their preferred growth scenario and see how it impacted the things that are most important to them, such as clean air, walkability, and homes close to jobs. They could also explore how other scenarios performed to further understand the tradeoffs and



FIGURE 1: YouChoose Bay Area Website, Home and Choices Page



consequences of local and regional development and investment decisions. YouChoose allowed users to rate, save, and share their vision of the future with others. It also presented users with various opportunities to get involved in the planning process. The website served as the primary mechanism for outreach and public input, and was designed to be effective for facilitated group discussions, workshops, and single-user (i.e., at home) interfaces. (See Figure 1.)

A 23-organization advisory group was established to vet the growth scenarios and guide the development of content for the website. That group, which met three times in 2010, included business representatives, health advocates, community groups, environmental advocates, school-related groups, housing advocates, and government agen-

cies. All of the organizations pledged to use the website to educate their constituents about the impact of land-use and transportation decisions on the things they care about in their communities.

As the YouChoose Bay Area tool was being completed, Northern California Public Broadcasting was engaged as the EBA media partner to provide coverage of the opportunities and challenges facing California's local efforts to plan for sustainable growth. Specific outcomes were to create a special landing page, labeled Miles to Go, on the KQED website where original stories, curated content, and relevant links to information such as the YouChoose website would be housed; a six-part radio and online series; and two four-minute television spots to be aired between regular program-

ming. The intent of the media work was to help a large number of residents learn about how smart growth, livable communities, and climate change are connected, and, ideally, to connect them to the work of EBA.

*The retreat was a turning point in which the team recognized that they could achieve greater impact working together – the government, philanthropic, and nonprofit sectors – rather than independently.*

#### Public Outreach Phase

With the website design completed, the community foundation and its initiative partners turned their attention to public outreach. As part of the outreach phase, they initially intended to use the YouChoose Bay Area website at public forums in municipalities that were updating their general plans. At the same time, they were considering how the tool could inform the development of the “sustainable communities strategy” mandated by SB 375 and being carried out by the Bay Area’s elected planning bodies, the Metropolitan Transportation Commission (MTC) and Association of Bay Area Governments (ABAG). This law required, for the first time, that climate, housing, transportation, and other challenges be addressed in a single regional framework to guide growth and investment across the region rather than as separate challenges requiring separate plans.

Two primary audiences were considered important for the outreach phase of EBA. The first included elected officials, city planners, and leaders of organizations who might not have immediately seen their mission as connected to land use but whose interest in community and civic life made them ripe for adopting a strategic approach to regional and local planning. The second audi-

ence included advisory group members and the community foundation’s grantee organizations that had a vested interest in regional planning and smart growth and could mobilize large numbers of constituents to participate in EBA.

The format of the public forums was in part informed by the community foundation’s experience in a June 2010 national town hall discussion involving 19 cities and 3,500 people across the country talking about the nation’s fiscal future. This event, One Nation One Economy, was led by AmericaSpeaks, a national organization whose mission is to invigorate American democracy by engaging citizens in the public decision-making that most affects their lives. In November 2010, AmericaSpeaks invited teams from the 19 town hall sites to a three-day retreat in Washington, D.C., that focused on how each community could develop civic capacity to support deliberations about local or state issues. The Silicon Valley team consisted of two community foundation employees, one MTC staff member, and Greenbelt Alliance’s executive director. The retreat was a turning point in which the team recognized that they could achieve greater impact working together – the government, philanthropic, and nonprofit sectors – rather than independently. It was then that they decided to link EBA’s public-outreach effort to the regional planning decision-making being led by MTC and ABAG.

On the one hand, the decision to actively partner with government had many benefits. It provided the opportunity to combine resources and marry the EBA public forums with the official public-input process, which government was required to do. As Miriam Chion, a senior planner from ABAG, noted,

We realized there were a lot of commonalities and overlap between what they were trying to do and what we were required to do. We could maximize resources by collaborating. They have expertise in knowledge, communications, and public engagement. We thought that would be extremely important and beneficial. (FSG Social Impact Advisors, 2011, pp. 1-2)

FIGURE 2: YouChoose Santa Clara County Forum at Microsoft, April 2011



On the other hand, nonprofit partners were skeptical of government's ability to effectively collaborate and engage residents given past experiences. In addition, more players (often up to 15 people, mostly from the government agencies) were now involved in the design of the forums, which increased the complexity and time required for planning.

The forums took place in April and May 2011 in 10 San Francisco Bay Area locations. EBA recruited for and organized six of the forums; MTC and ABAG managed the other four. The format for all 10 was jointly designed and adjusted in response to audience reaction and interaction. There were three intended objectives for each of the forums:

- To provide participants with an understanding of the SB 375 legislation and its importance.
- To provide participants with an opportunity to identify the things they most cared about,

the growth scenarios they preferred, and the impact of their choices using a web-based simulation.

- To provide direct input to the MTC and ABAG officials on people's choices of how and where to grow and how to spend an anticipated \$200 billion in transportation funding.

In San Mateo, participants gathered at the public library, an iconic setting for civic discourse. In Mountain View, they met on Microsoft's campus, a place equally iconic to Silicon Valley for different reasons. Participants heard presentations from experts about the topic at hand: sustainable growth. They experimented with the YouChoose Bay Area tool. They asked questions, voiced concerns, and interacted with a diverse group of fellow residents around each table. Participants in these forums used interactive keypad polling devices to answer questions so collective opinion and data could be displayed in real time. The



gatherings highlighted the opportunities and challenges of bringing people together to talk about what they want in a community. (See Figure 2.)

*At times, the conservative and progressive elements of the audiences were at loggerheads and our facilitators were challenged to keep the forums on track.*

For the first time in the Bay Area, planning workshops attracted attention from the region's Tea Party and other staunchly conservative groups, such as the Minutemen and the Ayn Rand Society. Their perspective was characterized by a desire to protect individual property rights and some subsequently acknowledged that they engaged in an organized effort to disrupt the proceedings. At times, the conservative and progressive elements of the audiences were at loggerheads and our facilitators were challenged to keep the forums on track.

## Results

Envision Bay Area achieved many successes that were documented through two independent evaluations: One was conducted by FSG Social Impact Advisors to assess the impact of the Knight Community Information Challenge as a whole, and the other by Arabella Philanthropic Investment Advisors to assess the impact of EBA specifically. Below are some of the highlights.

The outreach brought residents who had not previously been involved into the regional planning process. More than 800 residents participated in the 10 forums. Close to 25 percent had never attended a meeting or workshop on regional planning in the Bay Area. Twenty-one percent of those who completed the YouChoose prioritization process online had never before accessed

information about regional planning on the Internet.

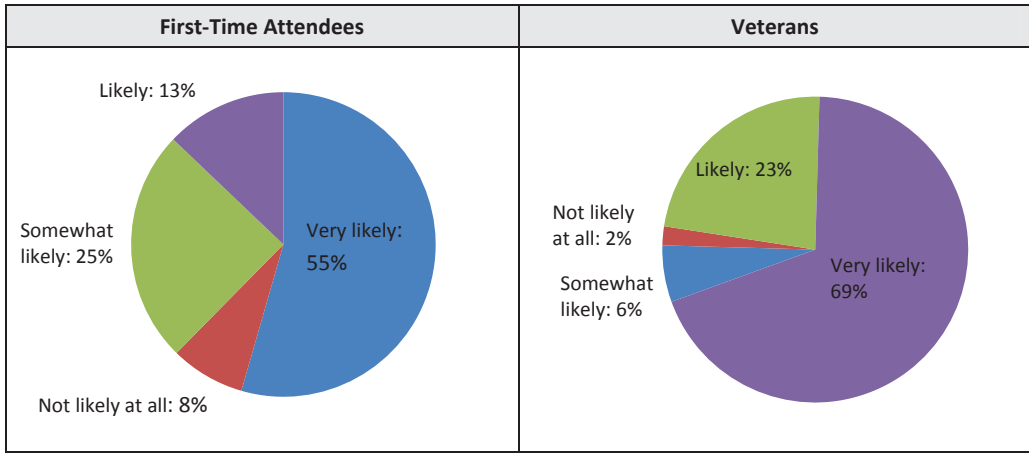
In addition, nearly half of the 294 participants responding to an online survey had spoken with a friend, relative, or neighbor at least four times since attending the forum or completing the online YouChoose tool. As our evaluation report noted,

This activity is far from trivial since regional planning tends to occur "under the radar" of various traditional and online news outlets; word-of-mouth is likely to be critical for spreading news and building additional interest in regional planning within communities. (Arabella Philanthropic Investment Advisors, 2011, pp. 4-5)

The YouChoose tool met its objective of bringing technical information to the public in thoughtful, understandable ways. Since the public launch of the YouChoose tool, there have been 7,000 unique visitors to the site. Several thousand of those visitors left an email address, asking to receive information on regional planning issues. Greenbelt Alliance and MTC have continued to stay in touch with these people, many of who were newcomers to regional planning issues. The tool has filled a need for content that is data-driven and understandable. As one participant from the Santa Clara County forum said, "Love the interactive web tool! Very easy to picture results of relevant decisions." By introducing an online platform to offline community meetings, the foundation was able to make information actionable and engaging.

Envision Bay Area provided a model of how government, philanthropy, and the nonprofit sector could work together and take collective action. Convening advocacy groups, public media, government officials, and private-sector partners at one table is no easy task. Regional planning agencies such as MTC and ABAG have ultimate responsibility for designing and implementing a sustainable regional plan. EBA partners agreed that without the foundation's active involvement, these government agencies would not have been able to reach such a broad spectrum

FIGURE 3: Comparing Likelihood of Future Involvement, First-Time Attendees and Veterans



of diverse populations and organizations. Jeremy Madsen, executive director of Greenbelt Alliance, described the collaborative leadership of the foundation like this:

Other foundations write a check, but expect us to do the work and report back. Silicon Valley is a collaborator in the work, taking advantage of our unique strengths, rather than allowing our differences to create a wall between us. (FSG Social Impact Advisors, 2011, p. 19)

The community foundation's leadership created conditions for lasting, meaningful change. Through the YouChoose tool and forums, new perspectives were captured in the regional planning process. "Using information, we got citizens to think differently about the interplay between housing, transportation and jobs," said Emmett Carson, the community foundation's president and chief executive officer. "It was exciting to see people from very different points of view interacting with each other in the workshops" (FSG Social Impact Advisors, 2011, p. 19).

"That's democracy in action," said Margot Rawlins, the community foundation's community leadership officer (FSG Social Impact Advisors, 2011, p. 19).

The results also indicated that some attendees and users were so motivated by the discussions

that they planned to continue their involvement in planning: more than three-quarters of the respondents overall indicated they were likely or very likely to be involved with local or regional planning issues in the future. For the respondents who were first-time attendees, more than half indicated they were likely (13 percent) or very likely (55 percent) to stay involved. (See Figure 3.)

In addition to creating more informed and engaged residents around regional planning issues, EBA built stronger networks among organizations. For example, the accuracy of the YouChoose tool allowed both advocacy groups and government agencies to have more confidence in the numbers and metrics they use for modeling and projecting. This led to the Bay Area adopting more aggressive greenhouse gas emission reduction targets by 2035 (i.e., a 13 percent reduction versus the initial 5 percent to 6 percent reduction recommended by staff) than would otherwise have been the case without EBA's behind-the-scenes conversations with MTC and ABAG.

## Lessons

Envision Bay Area has yielded a number of successes outlined above of which we can be proud. Equally important, however, is the fact that this experience also offered a number of lessons in how to engage stakeholders with differing ideologies and find common ground on complex public

policy issues. Below are a few of the lessons that we hope are useful to the field.

*For the community foundation staff involved in EBA, working with the media on a project-specific basis was new. The organization does not allow editorial control to be exercised by anyone else, including program funders. This meant that once the foundation had presented story possibilities, NCPB decided whether to pursue the story or not, how to shape the story and what experts would be in it.*

#### *Words Matter*

How the team talked about the issues of change and growth could dramatically influence the terms of debate in development decisions. In fact, as one colleague said, talking about growth and development with the public is so challenging that public relations agencies around the country have created a virtual Library of Congress on how to do it.

For example, research conducted for the Funders' Network for Smart Growth and Livable Communities indicated that saying "sprawl is the problem and smart growth is the answer" was a frame to avoid (ActionMedia, 2005, p. 6). This is because the argument for smart growth has frequently rested on the idea that individual rights are subordinate to the common good and sprawl is not necessarily viewed as a bad thing – it is a form of progress. Knowing this, we were careful not to use "smart growth" as a label to describe any of the growth scenarios developed for EBA.

This same research also indicated that people want choices and options on how communities are designed and how they live. This was one of the reasons the tool and forums were promoted under the banner of YouChoose Bay Area. EBA was also very intentional in emphasizing "choice" as the stage was set at each of the forums.

#### *Technology: A Blessing and a Curse*

YouChooseBayArea.org was an innovative digital platform that the community foundation used to inform and engage residents. The community foundation underestimated the time and complexity involved in creating it. Because of this, the amount of time for beta testing was limited and this role fell to willing members of the advisory group. Had there been more time, beta testing with a more diverse group of stakeholders – those supportive of smart growth and those who were not – would have been conducted. The development of the tool also truncated the planning time necessary for the outreach phase of the initiative.

Lastly, the ongoing management and maintenance of the site, considering who will update the content, and how to continue to attract visitors are open questions. The old adage of "you can build it but it does not necessarily mean they will come" certainly rings true and is something to be considered in the planning stages of any significant technology project a community foundation undertakes.

#### *Media Controls the Message*

For the community foundation staff involved in EBA, working with the media on a project-specific basis was new. As a media organization, Northern California Public Broadcasting (NCPB) works hard to bring its audiences the best radio, television, websites, and educational materials. All of these efforts are directed toward fulfilling NCPB's mission to provide high-quality, noncommercial media that inform, educate, and entertain. The organization does not allow editorial control to be exercised by anyone else, including program funders. This meant that once the foundation had presented story possibilities, NCPB decided whether to pursue the story or not, how to shape the story and what experts would be in it.

This was a particularly hard concept to understand for the nonprofit advocacy partners, who wanted to exercise more influence on the selection and development of stories given that the work of NCPB was being funded through EBA. These partners felt the involvement of public radio and public television did not result in the hoped-for connections between the programming it produced and the specific regional planning issues that EBA addressed. However, the stories did provide an important focus on the connection between land use, transportation, and climate change for the public, and each time a story aired, there was an uptick in the number of visitors on the YouChoose website.

Making sure that there is a thorough understanding of issues around editorial control and that this understanding is shared among all partners is an important lesson and has relevance for future projects involving the media.

#### *Process Should Fit Purpose*

The purpose of the forums was to bring diverse people together to thoughtfully weigh options and consequences related to how we grow as a region. There were many conversations about the process of the forums, including the best time of day, day of week, and length. The community foundation decided on three-hour, weekday-evening sessions at which dinner was served. There was a lot of information to present in the forum, from the roles of the various institutions involved and explaining the mandate created by SB 375 to walking through the YouChoose Bay Area tool. This meant that it was well over an hour before forum participants had an opportunity to reflect on what they had heard and talk with each other in small groups. It also meant that the small-group discussions during which participants were to consider transportation-investment strategies, policy initiatives to support those strategies, and trade-offs were compressed into a short time frame. Compounding this was the fact that some of the small-group exercises were somewhat technical, requiring planning experts to participate and field questions. Some of the small-group facilitators were not as skilled as they should have been.

*Allowing time for participants to get to know one another and establish trust early on is also important so that people begin seeing the issues from perspectives other than their own.*

Complicated policy issues require adequate time to do them justice. Allowing time for participants to get to know one another and establish trust early on is also important so that people begin seeing the issues from perspectives other than their own. Lastly, the importance of skilled facilitators in the process cannot be over-emphasized.

#### *Expect the Unexpected*

While opposition at public forums is nothing new, we were not prepared for diametrically opposed points of view, especially when expressed so staunchly by Tea Party activists. These activists were extremely well organized, used blogs to communicate, and had training sessions prior to the forums on how to participate. In the words of one activist,

First I want to say that we did not go in there without preparing. We met ahead of time and strategized on how we would handle ourselves down to the minute detail. We developed a plan and implemented it. We registered for the event, showed up and questioned them mercilessly, about the details of their plan.  
(Gass, 2011, p. 1)

Deep distrust of both government agencies and the goals of the forums led the activists to a strategy of calculated disruption versus discussion. The challenge then, became how to have a good deliberative dialogue about growth and choices and engage individuals with differing opinions without it degrading into a shouting match. It was clear that the foundation needed to hone their “combat convening” skills, and given an aggressive time frame were able to neither identify nor con-

sult with firms that had this particular expertise. These organizations, such as Philanthropy for Active Civic Engagement, AmericaSpeaks, and Deliberate Democracy Consortium, can be very helpful guides when trying to encourage public participation and deal with potentially confrontational meetings.

*The community foundation was seen by some forum participants as being aligned with government, which was not a good thing given the public's vocal distrust in government.*

*Having representatives of advocacy organizations and policymakers jointly present at forums was also problematic for some participants.*

In the past, community foundations were likely to fund others to do deliberative work, but more of them are recognizing their ability to take on challenging and controversial community leadership issues within their regions. But in order to do that effectively, staff must develop the skills and capacities to engage diverse viewpoints and adapt to disruptive strategies in public deliberation. We had to keep reminding ourselves that this was democracy in action and that we had been successful in attracting a true cross-section of the public.

#### *The Risks and Rewards of Partnerships*

A 2005 study on the future of community foundations, "On the Brink of New Promise," documented the changing philanthropic landscape and noted that for community foundations to be relevant and viable over the long term, these institutions needed to expand beyond the realm of donor services and grant management to embrace new levels of leadership (Bernholz,

Fulton, & Kaspar). These new levels of leadership require active collaborate with others to aggregate resources, capacities, and connections to multiply reach and impact. While this was certainly the case with EBA, joining with government and non-profit advocacy organizations was not without its challenges.

For example, the community foundation was seen by some forum participants as being aligned with government, which was not a good thing given the public's vocal distrust in government. Having representatives of advocacy organizations and policymakers jointly present at forums was also problematic for some participants. When members of the Tea Party attended forums and accused the forums of a bias toward green activists, the foundation had to double its efforts to make sure the specific public agenda was clear, as were the contributions of each presenter. It also brought the realization that the community foundation needed to be clear about its institutional role in the public forums: It was trying to increase community awareness and engagement around the importance of planning for the future but not promoting any particular position on how to do it.

#### **Conclusion**

Through Envision Bay Area, Silicon Valley Community Foundation took advantage of a sophisticated new online tool, substantial knowledge of the issues, and experience facilitating communitywide dialogue to expand its leadership from two counties to nine. It brought new voices into the regional planning process, many of which will continue to stay involved. The effort brought government and nonprofit stakeholders together to agree on a common direction for public input to inform important policy decisions around the region's future growth.

It was not always easy to incorporate the diverse perspectives into the planning process, but there was legitimacy to be gained by doing so. EBA has armed the foundation with experience and a number of important lessons that will be carried into future work to engage the public on



complex and controversial issues. It also affirms the powerful roles that community foundations can play beyond that of funder. As the capacity of government and other public institutions to address critical issues diminishes, community foundations can step in to mobilize diverse citizens, present them with facts and options, and involve them in discussions to solve challenging problems. This as an essential part of a healthy democracy.

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*As the capacity of government and other public institutions to address critical issues diminishes, community foundations can step in to mobilize diverse citizens, present them with facts and options, and involve them in discussions to solve challenging problems.*

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