

Building Rural Livelihood: Case Studies & Go Deep Sessions

Thursday Morning and Early Afternoon

John Molinaro, *Vice President - Program / West Central Initiative (MN)*

Ann Tartre, *Director, Donor and Program Services / Maine Community Foundation*

Kathy Moxon, *Director, Institute for the North Coast; Chief Administrative Officer / Humboldt Area Foundation (CA)*

Terry Holley, *Vice President for Programs and Rural Development / East Tennessee Foundation*

Jennie Stephens, *Program Director / The Community Foundation Serving Coastal South Carolina*

Session Orientation and Flow

To remind you, this workshop – and the RDP learning effort in general – focuses on the question:

How can we utilize our program and grantmaking efforts to enhance the economic security of low-income rural families and the communities where they live?

So, unlike most community foundation program sessions, we are focusing both on program/ grantmaking in *rural* and on program/grantmaking efforts meant to foster *community and economic development*, especially to *benefit the poor* in some way.

We will begin the workshop on Thursday morning with an expository if overwhelming presentation by Janet Topolsky and Pat Vasbinder of the *Building Rural Livelihood Thinking and Action Framework* and *RDP Program Design Circle*. Then we go straight into the substance that illustrates this choices *Framework* – devoting the remainder of the morning to back-to-back presentations on what we consider to be *The Six Whats?* of RDP program and grantmaking (as in: *What* rural development approach or strategy will you support?). Five resource team members, each from a different RDPLN community foundation, will relate how their community foundations pursued a particular RDP *What?* strategy in their specific location. But in telling their stories, each will address *all* the *RDP Design Circle* questions they had to answer to put their particular RDP program effort together. Here's the roster:

- **Improve Employment:** John Molinaro – West Central Initiative
- **Strengthen Families:** Ann Tartre – Maine Community Foundation
- **Strengthen Nonprofits:** Kathy Moxon – Humboldt Area Foundation
- **Increase Civic Capacity:** Terry Holley – East Tennessee Foundation
- **Steward Natural and Cultural Resources:** Jennie Stephens – The Community Foundation Serving Coastal South Carolina

Then, after lunch, we will go into five breakouts – one for each case, so that you can “go deep” with whichever presenter/presentation most interests you without using the time of all participants. We will assign a facilitator to each breakout to help field questions and move the session along.

Overall, this *Building Rural Livelihood Thinking and Action Framework for Designing RDP Program and Grantmaking Efforts* is a piece of basic “intellectual capital” we are offering the field to use as fodder for improving Rural Development Philanthropy. We are not trying to advocate, rather we are trying to surface and detail useful distinctions and constructive questions that will improve the thinking and doing of community foundation leaders who want to do rural well. We expect that this workshop will provoke and produce much commentary and feedback on the structures – and we surely invite it!

Presentation Outline

Here are the questions we asked each resource team member to focus on during their case presentations. *Note:* We know that a few of the questions or sub-questions are more important or relevant to some community foundation efforts than others. If that is the case, the presenters will focus on those areas or issues that they think are most important to their story.

In essence, we asked the resource team presenters to tell us a *story* of how they chose to do a particular RDP program design in their region, why they chose it, what happened, and what they learned.

1. **Introduction.**

Name your *What?* and your story - and offer whatever brief orienting introduction you want (if any). Give us a sense of the timeframe of your RDP program story.

2. **Know Yourself First: What three-five key things did you know about your community foundation and your rural communities and populations before you started?**

The focus here is on the queries and prompts in the Framework's Step 3. With your specific *RDP What? Focus Story* in mind, give us some context for where you were when the story started. And please tell what really happened – no revisionist history here!

In short, tell participants **only three-five** (total) important context points related to one or several of the *Know Yourself First* Questions listed below. Note: These can be things you did *or did not* know.

- What was the rural capacity, motivation and mojo of your community foundation?
- What had you learned from your foundation's prior rural experience (did you even have any)?
- What was your CF's image with rural customers?
- What did you and did you not know about your rural regions, issues, organizations and people?
- If you had one, what was your rationale for why your foundation efforts should focus on low-income rural communities and families (or its niche for doing so)?

3. **Now Navigate the RDP Program Design Circle to elucidate how you got to the design of the RDP effort in your Focus Story.**

To do so, answer all the questions or points below in turn. *It will help if you consult the Step 4 worksheets in the Framework as you do this.*

Question 1: Catalyst?

- What was the internal or external catalyst that motivated you to do the RDP program and grantmaking activity in your Focus Story?
- What was it that the Catalyst *cared about* related to RDP? What *action* did the Catalyst take (see the Question 1 discussion table)?
- What ensuing Circle Question answers did this Catalyst most affect?

The Middle 6 Questions:

Do not answer these in the order they are listed. Instead, please address these in the precisely the order you think your foundation addressed them. (We can understand if some of them are "tied" – that is, were answered simultaneously. But tell us that as well, and why.)

▪ **Where?**

- What particular rural region, sub-region, place or set of places did you choose to target with your RDP program and grantmaking effort?
- What ensuing Circle Question answers did this choice most affect?

- **For Whom?**
 - What, if any, specific economically distressed rural population and/or condition did you want to target for special impact through your RDP program or grantmaking?
 - What ensuing Circle Question answers did this choice most affect?

- **What?**
 - In this Focus Story, what particular RDP Strategy (from the *Six Whats?* table) did you choose to support to improve the economic security of low-income rural people and the viability of their communities in your region?
 - What specific tactic or approach did you choose related to this strategy (also from the *Six Whats?* table – or add to it if need be)?
 - Did you need to also (or instead) pay attention to *Strategy 6: Address Potential Necessary Conditions* as part of this RDP effort? If yes, why and how did you do it?
 - What ensuing Circle Question answers did these choices most affect?

- **With Whom?**
 - With whom did you choose to work to help produce and deliver the goods – that is, to help make sure your program and grantmaking met its goals?
 - As grantee partners?
 - As delivery/technical assistance partners
 - As resource partners
 - How did you select each partner and structure your partnership (the selection methods, grant terms, regular contact, peer convening and TA, and monitoring)?
 - What ensuing Circle Question answers did these partner choices most affect?

- **How long?**
 - What is the length of time (if any) to which you committed funding and support for your RDP program effort?
 - What timeframe issues were raised for the community foundation? (See *How Long?* Worksheet.)
 - What ensuing Circle Question answers did your timeframe choice most affect?

- **Which Resources and How Much?**
 - What staff, board, program, operational and grant resources did you commit to your RDP effort?
 - What resources from your funding or action partners did you bring to the rural effort or leverage from inside or outside the region?
 - What ensuing Circle Question answers did your resource choices most affect?

Question 8: So What?

- Based on the design that emerged from your answers to the prior questions, list one or two realistic short- and medium-term outcomes (if any) that you were driving to achieve:
 - *For your partners/grantees* as a result of the community foundation’s support
 - *For rural communities and families* as a result of your partner’s/grantee’s actions

- What (if any) indicators, baselines/targets, and data collection tools and plan did you establish to track progress on these outcomes?
- What process(es) have you/do you use for you and your partners (including your grantees) to reflect on your progress and what you have learned and course correction?
- How often did/do you and your partners do such reflection?

- What are three things you learned from this RDP effort through reflection that cycled back into the redesign of the next phase – or into some other community foundation program/grantmaking effort?

4. How did it work or is it working? Tell us:

- What are the top *3-5 best things* that happened (to you, your grantees, your partners, your rural communities, etc.) because you pursued this RDP program effort?
- What are the top *3 toughest things* that you, your partners, or your rural constituents experienced because of this RDP program effort?
- What *3-5 lessons or pieces of advice* would you offer to yourself or another community foundation about what to do when designing an RDP program or grantmaking effort?