



## **PROJECT SUMMARY**

### **COMMON GROUND: BUILDING COLLABORATIONS FOR SUSTAINABLE COMMUNITIES IN THE SAN FRANCISCO BAY AREA**

Throughout the San Francisco Bay Area, region-wide organizations engaged in urban environmental, environmental justice and community development work are forming new alliances. Who are these groups and what issues are bringing them together? What lessons have key leaders in the community learned about building effective coalitions? What are the emerging trends and issues shaping the way in which people are working across these different fields?

Over the last year, the Diversity Network Project – under the direction of the San Francisco Foundation, the Wallace Alexander Gerbode Foundation, and the William and Flora Hewlett Foundation, and in cooperation with key community leaders – has explored these questions. This report presents the Project's findings.

#### **BACKGROUND**

For years, the environmental, environmental justice and social justice movements have struggled with questions of how to build common agendas and strategies. Even the best-intentioned projects have been challenging and the results, at times, disheartening.

The event that led to the formation of the Diversity Network Project was the demise, in 1998, of EDGE: The Alliance of Ethnic and Environmental Organizations. EDGE, formed in 1992 in the San Francisco Bay Area, was a nationally recognized coalition effort to build a common agenda in California between constituencies representing people of color and the environmental movement. Despite the best efforts of those involved, the organization folded.

In 1998, a core group of foundations who had funded EDGE began to examine opportunities for identifying and bringing new information and options for collaboration to the table.

This core group started their internal conversation by focusing on the intersection among urban environmental, community development and environmental justice organizations. From there, they began to examine the already overlapping agendas for groups in the San Francisco Bay Area. Examples of these intersections include:

- ▶ Effective public transit systems are essential to good air quality and mixed-use infill development.
- ▶ Responsible toxic material clean-up requires an informed community and environmentally appropriate technology.
- ▶ Safe parks and open space are cornerstones of a healthy neighborhood.
- ▶ Appropriate re-use of urban brownfields requires viable community development organizations.
- ▶ Successful ‘smart growth’ includes low-income housing.
- ▶ Safe drinking water necessitates an engaged public to advocate for environmental safeguards of the water’s source and delivery systems.

The core foundation group was well aware that there are many organizations in the San Francisco Bay Area already working together on these issues. What were the characteristics of these coalition efforts? What lessons were being learned? From these initial questions, the **Diversity Network Project** was formed.

## PURPOSE

The purpose of the Diversity Network Project (referred hereafter as the Project) is to:

1. Identify key lessons regarding what is needed to create and sustain successful, diverse, multi-issue coalitions and networks;
2. Assess the working relationships among the Bay Area’s regional community development, social justice and urban environmental networks/coalitions, and;
3. Share the gathered information with the community.

The Project explored these specific questions:

1. What is needed to create and sustain viable collaboratives and networks? What key lessons have been learned regarding mission, governance, leadership, staffing, funding, and membership?
2. What are the emerging trends and issues shaping the way in which people are working across the fields of community development, urban environmentalism and environmental justice in the Bay Area?
3. What Bay Area counties do these networks work in and how frequently?
4. How often do Bay Area networks interact programmatically and with which other networks?
5. What is the staffing, board and membership overlap among the networks?
6. What is the organizational “profile” (mission, key objectives, budget size, office location) of these Bay Area networks?

## METHODOLOGY

Following is a summary of the methodology used:

- ▶ The Project sponsors selected the consultants.
- ▶ The Project sponsors and consultants met to plan and frame the process.
- ▶ The Project sponsors and consultants set criteria for who would be interviewed and developed an interview list. Criteria for interviews included: 1) for organizations/ networks – each had to work on a regional basis in the San Francisco Bay Area; 2) for individual leaders – each needed substantive experience working in multi-issue coalitions. (Appendices A, B & C)
- ▶ The consultants developed a survey instrument with input from the Project sponsors with which to conduct interviews. (Appendix D)
- ▶ The Project sponsors contacted foundation colleagues to inform them of the Project and to invite their input.
- ▶ The consultants conducted confidential interviews, based on a common set of questions, varying in length from 30 minutes to an hour and twenty minutes.
- ▶ The consultants developed and disseminated two surveys to network organizations and analyzed the results.
- ▶ The consultants wrote summaries of findings and draft reports for review and input by the Project sponsors and the leaders interviewed.

## OUTCOMES

In 1999, the Project's consultants and sponsors have:

- ▶ Interviewed 33 key individuals, Bay Area leaders currently working in organizations closely linked to various collaborative and network efforts:
- ▶ 12 work in Bay Area regional networks; 10 work with organizations involved with networks and 11 are experienced leaders in the community. People of color comprised approximately 55% of those interviewed (African-American, Asian-Pacific and Latino) and nearly two-thirds of those interviewed were men.
- ▶ Surveyed 13 network organizations for their organizational "profile," of which 12 networks also provided information on constituency and program overlap.
- ▶ Prepared this report for dissemination to all interested parties.
- ▶ Held meeting with interviewed leaders to review draft report and discuss issues identified therein.

## PROJECT SPONSORS AND CONSULTANTS

The San Francisco Foundation, the Wallace Alexander Gerbode Foundation, and the William and Flora Hewlett Foundation sponsor the project. The San Francisco Foundation houses the Project. Program officers of these foundations serve as the Project's Steering Committee.

Omowale Satterwhite (Community Development Institute) and Kimery Wiltshire (The Wiltshire Group) serve as project consultants. They facilitated the Project, conducted the interviews, gathered the information and wrote this report.