



Member Spotlight

What happens when a grantmaker decides to loosen the reins of control to build collaborative networks? How can grantmakers remain strategic and focused while building partnerships? Following GEO's **Growing Social Impact in a Networked World** conference in San Francisco, we spoke with Mary Manuel, managing director of the McKay Foundation. In a brief Q&A with GEO, Mary shared with us her generous insight and advice on working with a network mindset by drawing on her experiences with the McKay Foundation's expanding efforts with catalyzing networks.

What initially prompted the McKay Foundation to seek out collaboration through networks?

I think on some level we have always worked this way. We are very attentive to how we are cultivating relationships with our colleagues in the funding community and with the executive staff of the organizations we fund. As we began to look more strategically at the impact of our grantmaking, we started mapping our existing network of relationships to understand where we had influence and played leadership roles, where we had strong partnerships and where there were some gaps were in terms of reaching critical mass on the change we were striving to achieve.

Two examples of ways we are using a network mindset are Cámbio and the California Civic Participation Funder's Table. Cámbio was launched out of the McKay Foundation's Capacity Building Program and has recently established itself as an independent LLC. Cámbio is a comprehensive, tailored program that trains leaders to manage change in themselves, their organizations, and their networks. The Funder's Table is a collaboration of 11 California funders who are partnering to increase the capacity of civic engagement networks in California.

What advice would you give to grantmakers that are just getting started working in and through networks?

I would say that by placing relationships at the center, you have to give up some control on knowing exactly what the outcome will be. You can have a very clear mission, vision, outcome, goals and strategic direction, but by placing yourself in a network mindset, you don't always know what the end result will look like. You are balancing the interests of other actors with your own, and new ideas and circumstances come up. We start with a simple framework that allows for maximum agility, so we can adjust as things change. We also place an emphasis on having fun, since you are often in deep engagement with colleagues. It helps when you like each other and have had opportunities to relate more personally over a meal or a drink prior to meetings.

What were some of the key takeaways for you from GEO's Growing Social Impact in a Networked World conference?

I am struck by how new this work still is in that much of it is still being defined. We are still trying to understand what works, what will be effective, and how much of this is naturally evolving vs. being intentionally created. The key takeaway for me in that context is that, as funders, we have to jump in and try things out, fail, get feedback and reflect, and learn from our mistakes.

What should people do to if they would like to find out more about your work in networks?

The California Civic Participation Funder's Table is going to be publishing a case study of how we have worked together and what we have learned to date. It will be ready next month and will be shared in the following issue of *GEONews*. To find out more about Cámbio or our work at the McKay Foundation, you can contact me at mmanuel@mckayfund.org.

Mary Manuel is the managing director of the McKay Foundation and a coach for the Cámbio program. The McKay Foundation funds progressive political infrastructure nationally and in the western states.