

GEO Member Spotlight



**The Seattle
Foundation**

Building Community in Complexity

When The Seattle Foundation decided to face education deficiencies head on in their community, they weren't about to go it alone.

There's a hidden problem concealed in the Seattle area, a region that ranks fourth in the world in per capita GDP.

The educated, innovative, productive workforce that has helped to propel the city of Seattle stands in stark contrast to the education of the region's low-income communities.

"We do a great job of importing talent from outside of the city. We have not done a great job of growing our own." said Michael Brown, vice president of community leadership at The Seattle Foundation, one of the largest community foundations in the U.S.

In six years, 67.1 percent of jobs in the state of Washington will require a postsecondary credential. Conversely, only 27 percent of students coming from low-income communities in the Seattle area will complete a postsecondary degree or credential.

The Seattle Foundation, like other community foundations, found itself in the unique role to play leader, advocate and convener.

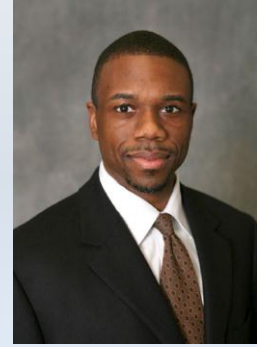
"We felt it was time to put a stake in the ground to say that we have an opportunity here," Brown said. But the foundation knew that they couldn't solve a problem like this on their own.

"The only way we're going to achieve this is through broad partnership. It can't just be The Seattle Foundation and the Gates Foundation saying, 'This is a problem, and this is what we're going to do,'" Brown said. "If we're going to be successful, this had to be a community-wide effort."

In the fall of 2009, The Seattle Foundation played a key role in convening interested stakeholders. They brought in the public sector, the school districts, community-based organizations and funders. Everyone was to have ownership in the vision and execution, Brown said.

"Funders need to be responsive to what the community feels is important," Brown said.

It was through this collaborative approach that the Road Map for Education Results project was born. With it, low-income students in the



Michael Brown, Vice President of
Community Leadership, The Seattle
Foundation

The Road Map Project Team

The Road Map Project was composed of hundreds of committed individuals and organizations. Below are the components of this passionate team:

Project Sponsors

Providing strategic direction

K-12 Superintendents and Community College Presidents

Connecting system leaders

Aligned Funders

Investing for greater system impact

Community Center for Education Results

Providing staffing support for the
Road Map Project

Community Network and Advocates Council

Supporting parents and community
involvement

Education Results Network

Providing input and building
connections

Work Groups

Analyzing data to track performance,
identifying strategies that will
improve education outcomes and
reviewing results to inform changes
in practice

Seattle area will find new support for educational achievement — from pre-kindergarten to completion of college or career training.

Joining The Seattle Foundation are nine other sponsors/collaborators: The Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation, The League of Education Voters, Seattle Community Colleges District, City of Seattle, Puget Sound Educational Service District, The Technology Access Foundation, OneAmerica and The University of Washington.

Additionally, a network of concerned stakeholders has grown out of The Road Map Project. Today, more than 75 organizations are participating in the Education Results Network, which meets multiple times per year to learn about Road Map efforts, provide feedback on key elements of the work and identify opportunities for deeper involvement.

Through it all, Brown said the key to success is stakeholder engagement.

“If we’re not executing all of these principals with how you engage stakeholders, this is just going to fall apart,” Brown said. “It’s such a vital piece of informing us of the work that we should be doing or could be doing.”

Feedback and evaluation require time and hard work, but they are critical in collaborative environments, Brown said. One of the keys to effective feedback is to bring stakeholder networks together. Without The Seattle Foundation promoting the importance of convening stakeholders, parents may have only communicated with school districts or schools only communicated with community colleges. If funders don’t want to be left out of the loop, they might just have to bring everyone into the loop themselves.

“It has to have constant feedback mechanisms allowing folks to throw their input in,” Brown said. “Then it gets massaged, and then you kind of go back at it again.”

Community foundations often have a unique ability to convene stakeholders given the credibility and trust that they hold in the community. They don’t have to always lead on an issue, Brown said, but they can raise an issue up and build the necessary partnerships in order for others to run with it.

“It has to be kind of messy work,” Brown said. “If all of this was easy we would have solved it a long time ago.”

Founded in 1946, [The Seattle Foundation](#) is one of the largest community foundations in the U.S. with total assets of about \$600 million. The foundation seeks to create a healthy community through engaged philanthropy, community knowledge and leadership.

[Michael Brown](#) is vice president of community leadership at The Seattle Foundation and served on the Conference Planning Committee for the 2012 GEO National Conference.

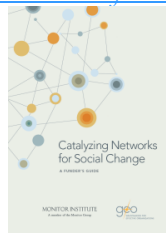
To learn more about The Road Map Project, visit the [Community Center for Education Results](#) website, or watch [Mary Jean Ryan’s short talk](#) from the 2012 GEO National Conference.

GEO resources that relate to the topics covered in this member spotlight:

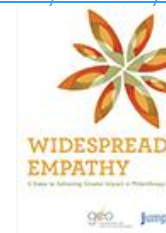
[*Do Nothing About Me Without Me*](#)



[*Catalyzing Networks for Social Change*](#)



[*Widespread Empathy*](#)



Find these and other resources for grantmakers at www.geofunders.org.