



Workforce Leadership Café #3 — Central Maryland

Hosted by the Aspen Institute Economic Opportunities Program, January 18, 2024

Description

How can local funders support capacity building and leadership development in workforce development? Have a seat in the [Workforce Leadership Café](#) on Thursday, January 18, at 2 p.m. EST, to listen in on a frank conversation between two community-based funders who have supported capacity building and leadership development across their communities in two different settings.

We'll hear from Windy Deese of United Way of Central Maryland and Maggie Martinelli of the Scranton Area Community Foundation about how philanthropic organizations can support capacity building and local leaders in workforce development, which is sure to be an insightful conversation. Windy and Maggie will reflect on their experience as our partners for the [Baltimore](#) and [Northeastern Pennsylvania](#) Workforce Leadership Academies, and they'll share lessons from across their work. What can the workforce development field learn from those efforts, and what are we doing well? All participants are invited to join the Café for a 15-minute meet-and-greet after the event.

This is the third in a series of [five conversations with our partners in local Workforce Leadership Academies](#). In addition to joining us on January 18, we invite you to listen to our previous discussions with [Pima Community College and the Center for the Future of Arizona](#), and with local workforce board [Workforce Solutions Alamo](#). Learn more at [as.pn/WLAcafe](https://www.aspeninstitute.org/events/workforce-leadership-cafe-3-united-way-of-central-maryland-scranton-area-community-foundation/).

For more information about this event — including video, audio, transcript, speaker bios, and additional resources — visit our website:

<https://www.aspeninstitute.org/events/workforce-leadership-cafe-3-united-way-of-central-maryland-scranton-area-community-foundation/>

Speakers

Windy Deese

Vice President Public Policy and Economic Advancement, [United Way of Central Maryland](#)

Maggie Martinelli

Chief Operating Officer, [Scranton Area Community Foundation](#)

Sheila Maguire

Senior Fellow, The Aspen Institute

Dee Wallace

Senior Fellow, The Aspen Institute

Summary

This transcript is a conversation between Windy, Maggie, Sheila, and Dee. They discuss the importance of capacity-building in the workforce development field and the need for collaboration and partnerships among organizations. They also emphasize the need for funders to support and encourage collaboration and to be open to funding innovative and collaborative projects. They suggest that organizations should be willing to be vulnerable and honest about their needs and challenges when applying for funding. The conversation highlights the importance of building trusting relationships between funders and grantees and the power dynamics involved in the funding process.

Transcript

Sheila Maguire (00:04)

Hello and welcome. I'm Sheila Maguire, a senior fellow with The Aspen Institute Economic Opportunities Program. Thank you for joining us today for the Leadership Cafe, the third in a series of conversations with partners who we've worked with over the past two years to sponsor and facilitate workforce leadership academies. The Workforce Leadership Academies has grown out of the Economic Opportunities Program's long commitment to leadership development in the workforce development field. In short, academies bring together leaders from the diverse organizations and agencies that make up the local workforce ecosystem into a 10 month, or year long, really, fellowship. Together, they have the rare chance to step back from their roles and from the day-to-day to look together at the local ecosystem through a systems and race equity lens, and make recommendations for improvement. These cafes are intended to bring together people like yourselves who are interested in how investments in what we like to call the "workforce workforce," i.e., the leaders, the managers, the frontline workers who make up our system, and how those investments could significantly grow the capacity of local ecosystems.

In a recent blog, my colleague Dee Wallace and I shared why we believe workforce professionals need their own good job strategy, and that investments in developing the human infrastructure at the local level can foster a more collaborative and innovative workforce ecosystem, the great thing that we all know we need. In the series so far, we have been joined by partners from Pima Community College and the Center for the Future of Arizona, who run the Southern Arizona Academy, and by Workforce Solutions Alamo, the local workforce board in San Antonio and the surrounding Alamo County. And today we are going to be talking with our partners from the United Way of Central Maryland, who sponsored and facilitated the Baltimore Academy, and the Scranton Area Community Foundation, who facilitated and sponsored the academy in Northeast Pennsylvania in the Scranton area. But before we get started, and I know we're going to have a great chat with these two fabulous women, let's just do a quick review of our technology.

You are all muted. We do welcome your questions. Please use the Q&A button at the bottom of the screen to submit and upvote questions. We'll be taking those at the end of our conversation. We also encourage your perspective if something is an idea you have or something that you... A reading or something, a resource that you know, please feel free to put that in the chat. And if you have technical difficulties, please message us or chat to us in the chat or at the email that we will put in the chat for you. The event is being recorded and will be shared via email and posted on our website, and closed captions are available. Please click on the CC button if you need those. To those of you who want to chat further, we're going to have an after party. We're not serving anything, so it's metaphoric, but we will open another Zoom room for those of you who really have to say something or ask something, to join us for another 15 minutes at the end.

So here we go. Grab our coffee, tea or any other beverage, and I'm so pleased to introduce to you Maggie Martinelli, who is the Chief Operating Officer of the Scranton area community, who oversees community initiatives, including capacity-building and support for nonprofits. And Windy Deese, who is Vice President of Public Policy and Economic Advancement at the United Way of Central Maryland, who leads their policy work, and has developed a range of capacity-building throughout Maryland. So Maggie, Windy, here we are. As we start our conversation today, could each of you take a little time, I know along with the Leadership Academy, we're just one of the many sorts of community and capacity-building initiatives that you are engaged in. Could you tell us a little bit about what you're doing in the capacity-building realm? Who'd like to start us off?

Maggie Martinelli (04:42)

I'll turn it to Windy.

Windy Deese (04:46)

Thank you, Maggie. I was all ready to follow your lead.

Maggie Martinelli (04:50)

No, it's okay. I can go first if you want me to.

Sheila Maguire (04:53)

No, it's all right. Good afternoon everyone. It is a pleasure to be able to sit in the cafe and have a conversation about capacity-building as it relates to workforce development. So United Way of Central Maryland was a latecomer to this workforce development space. And as such, we initially took steps to learn the workforce development system. And what better way than to partner with the state of Maryland in their SNAP employment and training program. And I would say that, while we knew that that was just going to be a stepping stone for us, we also recognized that our organization was not ideally positioned to be the provider of the service, as much as it was to work with other providers in that space; to support them, to even bring together thought partners around the needs of workforce development. And one of the first things we did was we convened a meeting with those folks in workforce development around our ALICE report that United Way put out around 2018, a report that, in our minds, is rather transformational.

It's called ALICE and it stands for Asset Limited Income Constrained Employed. It's what we were typically calling the working poor. And this report highlighted the plight of those who work hard, and oftentimes have to work multiple jobs just to make ends meet, yet they struggle. And one of the things that we identified pretty quickly was that the benefits cliff really provides even more challenges, and it's two steps backwards and one step forward. And so during that convening, it was the first time that many of the folks who are providing workforce development training programs had even met each other. And what they developed was a list of recommendations from a workforce development perspective on what needs to happen to impact the benefits cliff. And so that's how we got into this space, and our approach is to help support other nonprofits, not just by funding, but also by creating opportunities to increase capacity.

Maggie Martinelli (07:39)

Windy, you helped really set both of us up there. I appreciate you helping to set the stage. We have been on a very similar path at the Scranton Area Community Foundation. We are proud to be an anchor institution in our community, but we also recognize that, relative to maybe other foundations in our community or nationally, we, as proud as we are about what we're able to do through our grants program, we also recognize that we are not going to be able to meet our mission through grant dollars alone. The need is going to always outpace the resources that we have. So it really becomes incumbent on us to think about what are the other ways that we can meet our mission. And a big part of that is helping to build the capacity of the nonprofits in the community at large, to be able to find creative ways to help everybody meet their missions.

So the support has to go beyond just the dollars that we're able to grant out to these organizations. We've done initiatives through what we call our Center for Community Leadership and Nonprofit Excellence. It allows us to provide technical training, provide support through giving consultant grants to nonprofits, and we have a relationship with eCornell so that nonprofit professionals in our community can receive Cornell University certificates through their online program. So there's a lot of different ways in which we execute that through the nonprofit realm. But another big piece of what we do is around just community impact projects. So what are the major issues and needs in our community that really need to be addressed? And I don't think these needs in our community are much different than so many other communities that we've interacted with through this program. Obviously, workforce being a

massive piece of this, but it also comes down to housing, transportation, child care, the ability to advocate for oneself.

All of these challenges that really go back to the quality of life for individuals and what's enabling people to find some economic mobility. And really, unfortunately there's no silver bullet, no one solution that's going to make it easier. So we do our best to really take these initiatives, try to take a holistic view of them, doing what we can and what we exceed well at. We are not direct program providers. We have no interest in being direct program providers. It's just not what we do well. But as a community foundation, we're able to leverage our resources, our knowledge, our connections, all the things that we have at our disposal, leverage those to bring more people to the table, bring diverse groups of people to the table, break down a lot of the silos that exist in these areas of need, and just be the table setter to convene these groups.

Not to say we have incubated some projects and programs, but again, it's really more of an incubation, it's about the idea of now, all right, who can take this on in the long term? So while we're not a workforce agency, that doesn't mean that we can't help facilitate workforce change in our community that will overall meet our mission, which, if I hadn't mentioned yet, is really to enhance the quality of life for individuals in our community. So that's a holistic view of what we do, and there's a lot of different pieces to that work, but it's really all at the sake of meeting our mission to help our community.

Sheila Maguire (11:41)

Great...

Windy Deese (11:42)

I was just going to say that was music to my ears, Maggie, especially when you spoke of the holistic approach. I think that everyone has been so careful to stay in their lane, and one of the terms that I hear often in this area is "mission creep." And you try to look a little beyond what you're doing and "Oh, be aware of mission creep." But we've got to get over that, because what we really have to do is look at the people that we're serving, and while they need a job, they may also need childcare. Transportation is a huge issue, and we can't expect people to be self-sufficient and successful unless we are looking at that whole being and what needs to happen to give them every opportunity to succeed.

Maggie Martinelli (12:36)

Yeah, it's so important, and I think it is... You do have to think about that mission creep and making sure that people aren't taking on programs that somebody else can be doing better, but that's the whole point of the collaborative piece of this. And again, what we can do from a funder perspective is challenge the nonprofits that we work with to think more strategically about collaborating with each other. Obviously, looking at the holistic picture, but also looking at who else can they partner with, and how do we make this more of a tapestry of services rather than one place feeling like they have to be everything. They don't have to be everything, but they should know where they can find everything.

Windy Deese (13:20)

Absolutely. Absolutely. And I think we should probably give Sheila an opportunity to jump in here.

Maggie Martinelli (13:25)

Sorry, Sheila.

Sheila Maguire (13:26)

Hey, I asked for conversation and that's what I wanted. I was just interested, just really briefly, but I know that there's some very specific frontline training or approaches that you've used. And I wonder, could you just give us a little flavor of what some of those are? And I'm thinking of the kinds of things we've discussed around case management, financial education, those kinds of things. Just give us a little bit of a flavor of those kinds of things that you're engaged in.

Windy Deese (13:57)

You're it, Maggie.

Maggie Martinelli (13:59)

All right. So we will typically respond to our nonprofit community. A big part of what we try to do is listen, and listen to what other nonprofits are saying where they have needs. But you've mentioned some really important pieces, supporting... I know Windy has a really great program around case managers that I'm sure she'll talk about, but for instance, we're doing a case management program where we're going to be teaching them about budgeting so that they can then use those skill sets to take it to their clients. We have great volunteers who are willing to help with those types of programs. We are doing a series on board development. We do a series on AI. So we really try to listen to what the needs are that we're hearing from our nonprofit community, develop programs, try to find speakers, local or national, that can really help address a lot of those topics.

And then in the instances where a general class is not quite enough, that's where we also provide grants to organizations to bring in a consultant to work directly one-on-one with these organizations. And I'll say that we also try to really infuse it into the overall culture of our organization as well. When we revamped our grants process, we really thought, for instance, about what are we asking our nonprofits to supply to us via their, applications and is it things that we're going to need, or are we just unnecessarily burdening our applicants for information that we don't even use anyways? So we really took a hard look in thinking about not just, say, in capacity-building and offering training and calling it a day, but really thinking about what is it that we as funders are doing to help, truly, the non-profits build capacity? And if we're asking them to fill out a grant application that takes them weeks to complete, well then we're not actually helping their capacity.

So same with final reporting. Are we asking for reports that are so cumbersome, it's just an unreasonable amount of information that we're requesting? No, we have to cut that back. We still have to report to our donors. We still have to report on impact. So it's not that we can just throw those things out, but are we even doing anything with the information that we're asking for? If we're not, if we're not using that information, stop asking. Stop asking for them to provide that. It's just you have to not just talk to the talk, you have to walk the walk.

Windy Deese (16:37)

Absolutely. When I entered this space, what I heard most frequently was, from employers, was we can't find good workers. And then on the other side, we have these training programs and we're having challenges in connecting with employers. And oftentimes when you were at the table, the employer was absent. And one of the things that United Way wanted to do was to be able to find a way to engage employers, so that when new employees came to their companies, that there was a smoother transition. And I noticed that one of the organizations that we're collaborating with, the source, Alison Freese, is on the call and we were so happy to learn about the work that she's doing in Michigan, as well as the work that's being done across the country. Each program has a different name, but United Way of Central Maryland is calling our program WorkWays. And what we're doing is providing a resource navigator who will work with both the employer and the employee to address some of those barriers and issues that are happening at home that don't stop when they enter the business environment.

They're still there. They weigh on the minds of the employees. And as a result of that, productivity suffers. We were just looking at a stat that was shared at a training program that one of our staff members went to, where it said that \$7.6 trillion is lost in productivity, and if companies aren't turning a profit, they can't continue to stay in business. And so we've got to build those bridges to help employers understand those ALICE workers that are in their workforce. There's a lot of things that employers can do to make the road a little bit easier, and it's just a matter of peeling that out of them so that they can see what options are available, and at the same time help that good employee, whether they're new or whether they're incumbent, to better manage their situations. And one of the offerings is in financial literacy.

And so we're helping employees, when they get that first check, to understand why it's not showing exactly the amount of money that they thought it should, and how to better spend their money or manage their money. And one of the things that I recently heard, one of the terms that I absolutely loved, was rather than referring to this as budgeting, using the term "spending plan." And if you think about it, you make a budget, and your budget is a month to month to month budget, and usually half the month through you've blown it, and you're off track and you're distracted or whatever.

But if you're talking about a spending plan, a spending plan goes well beyond a month. You could make a 12-month spending plan. You can blow it in the first month, but you still have time between now and the end of the year to get back on course, and maybe move yourself above and beyond where that budget had you at the end of the year. And so I think, too, that our language is very important; how we communicate with the folks that we are trying to support, and how we present what we are doing to them, that makes more sense. And it's just a matter of using common, simple sense to be better able to manage the situations that employees find themselves in.

Maggie Martinelli (21:03)

Sorry, go ahead, Sheila.

Sheila Maguire (21:04)

Oh no, you always trump me.

Maggie Martinelli (21:07)

So no, I was just going to say you're so right, Windy, about that language being important. The class that we talked about was budgeting for our case managers as an example. We refer to it as financial confidence rather than competence, because if you're getting financial competence classes, it implies that they're incompetent and that they need to learn competence, which is not fair. I mean that it's not always accurate. What we are trying to do is build their confidence in the topic, and feel like they can confidently walk into a bank and open a checking and saving account, feel like they can confidently check their credit score and know what to look for. All of these things, it's not to say that they don't know how to do it, maybe they do, maybe they don't. But the point is that everyone can use a little bit more confidence, especially when it comes to the financial aspects of their life.

And so I think whether for us as funders, whether it's us supporting nonprofits or us supporting those nonprofits to take the same mentality of capacity building, it applies for organizations and individuals. Again, it comes really back to understanding what the needs are, listening to what those needs are, providing the supports, looking at something holistically, and closing that feedback loop, too. So, "Hey, listen, you asked for this, we tried to do this, did this work? Did it not work?" And again, just keeping that open line of communication. You can't do that if you're working in silos.

Sheila Maguire (22:37)

So, what would you say are some of the challenges as a funder, a local funder? Or how do you think local funders are well-positioned, and what are some of the challenges for local funders to play this role in capacity-building as well as other roles in the community? What do you think about that question?

Windy Deese (23:05)

One of the things that we talked about in our academy was the fact that, as nonprofits, we're being set up and forced into a competitive environment. We're limited in the work that we can do by the funds that we're able to raise, and if you have a funder who is looking at who's doing the work and how well it's done, oftentimes your smaller organizations miss out on opportunities because they are not as well known and therefore not as well funded as some of the larger organizations.

There was a time, and it wasn't that long ago, where funders were really pushing for collaborations, and we've gotten away from that. I think that we need to be encouraging organizations to partner, because at that point you can really leverage those dollars and achieve so much more together than trying to manage your operation and use the limited funds that are being provided for you. Looking at, as Maggie said, your strengths, many organizations are offering case management. That's not their space. They do a phenomenal job in training, but we've got to build those relationships and we've got to develop that trust so that we can say, "Hey, look, here's an opportunity. How can I achieve this with a partner? Who is that partner, and how do we make this work for both of us?"

Maggie Martinelli (25:05)

Yeah, exactly, Windy. I couldn't agree more. I think the challenge from a local funder perspective is as I mentioned before, but with the resources, that the need is going to outpace the resources that we have. We do our best to try to reward collaboration wherever possible. So putting our dollars behind

those projects that are working in a more collaborative nature and being a leader in that regard. I think that we serve an important role in our community, even if we are not the biggest funder. And so I think that that doesn't mean that we can't still bring people together and help set that table.

I do think about, really, the need, once again, I said, to put your resources where you really want them to go. I know that sounds a little bit obvious, but the fact is that things...those messages are being sent through your grants and through the training programs and things that you're doing, so you can send really strong messages through what you're willing to do. And I also think there's an opportunity, from a funder perspective, to break down the competitiveness. I understand why it's there and I think Windy's a hundred percent correct, that is if you feel like you're competing with one another for grants and limited resources, it can definitely feel that way. The thing I try to challenge a lot of the nonprofits with, when I do have those conversations, and this comes back to what their needs are with individuals, is are you mission-focused or are you organization-focused? What's more important?

Because if your mission is the most important thing, then you are going to collaborate in order... Because just like we can't do our mission alone, these organizations can't achieve their missions alone either. And so what's more important to you, is it your mission or is it your organization? Because oftentimes those things can be at odds with one another. And so there's been some really beautiful examples of even simple collaborations to start with. An organization that provides workforce support can partner with a local food pantry to have a satellite location, especially if they've already been set up for satellite locations. You don't need to have your own food pantry and run that. You're a workforce organization. That doesn't mean that people aren't coming in that need food, and maybe you save them a stop, but all you had to do is collaborate with another organization that's used to setting up satellite pantries, and now you have food on site to help address that need right as it's in front of you, without actually having to take on the workload of managing a pantry which is outside your mission.

So it's just a small example, but important one, that you don't have to be the answer for everybody, but if you're not connected in with the rest of your community, and creating those partnerships, and looking for opportunities to say, "Hey, you do this really well and I do this really well, how can we help and support one another?" Guess what? The dollars are going to follow that. We talk a lot about this idea of, are we coming from a scarcity mindset or an abundance mindset? If you're coming from a scarcity mindset, then yeah, you are going to continue to fight over dollars and see other organizations as competitors fighting over the limited resources. Let's take that out. Let's look at it like the abundance mindset, which means that you're going to come in thinking, "What do we think we can achieve if we take money out of the equation?"

The money's always going to come back into the equation, but let's just take it out for a second and just think, "What does success look like if we had all the money in the world?" That's when you're going to come up with a creative solution that people will probably want to fund. You're going to find funding for that creative solution. Funders are looking for opportunities to make a big impact. So I just think... But it's hard if you're too caught into the day-to-day, stuck into that scarcity mindset like, "Oh, well, there's just not enough money to do that..." I'm not saying it doesn't matter. I'm just saying there's a time where you have to say, "We're going to put that aside and let's just... God, what if we had all the resources in the world? Let's think. Let's take that, let's narrow that and let's find something." Guess what? I can almost guarantee you're going to find somebody that's going to go, "Yeah, that's a great idea, you thought outside the box. I'll fund that." And the money will come.

Windy Deese (29:57)

Absolutely. Maggie, let's take it a step further. Let's challenge the callers today to identify three organizations, either here or in their communities, and forget about the money. Develop the program, develop the plan, and let's see who's the first one to come back with a... What do we call them? A bragging moment or whatever, where they can prove that it actually does work. Because you're like a hundred percent. I'm in a hundred percent agreement with you. You build a sound, innovative program, it will get funded.

Maggie Martinelli (30:47)

And that's where we challenged ourselves a lot through the fellowship. Sorry, I know, Sheila, you want to jump in. Just real quick. To tie it into the fellowships that we got to do, that's a little bit... That's really what we challenged our fellows to do. We asked them to come up with these "how might we" questions. "How might we do this?" And again, maybe it sounds very naive to think that you can take money out of the equation, but I think as long as you're in that strategy mindset, I think you have to. I think you have to put it to the side and say, "How might we do this? What does it look like?" And I've seen it happen. I've seen big ideas come forth and you are able to press forward. And as a funder, I can tell you confidently, somebody comes to me and says, "We thought, eh, the money will come, and we've found out this great situation."

It works out, it does work out. And at the end of the day, if it's not working out, maybe it's not the right actual solution. But you can't think big if you're worried about this. And that goes for the people that were ultimately trying to serve, too. I understand, if you're living paycheck to paycheck, day by day, you're worried about how you're going to live through the day, let alone... You can't think about the future. But I think it's incumbent on us as funders, as nonprofits, as community development organizations, to think big for them, because they're not going to do it for them... They shouldn't have to do that for themselves, because they have enough to worry about. We should be the ones helping to figure that out and make the road easier and build their capacity for them.

Sheila Maguire (32:39)

So it's very interesting to me, this question of how we give agency to workforce development, in this case, the workforce development field, where you're responding to other people's ideas, be it public policy or a funder initiative or whatever, to actually build the collaborations. What do you think we need to do differently in terms of the environment that would foster more holistic capacity-building kinds of activities that would bring the field to another level? What are some of the...? And are there things that are unique to workforce development different from the greater nonprofit and service delivery communities? What do you think we need to do, either at a policy level or at a... To foster the kind of collaboration that you're both talking about?

Windy Deese (33:37)

That's a great question, Sheila. Oftentimes when you're in your space, you view it as, "I'm the only one that's going through this. It's only happening here and nobody else understands because we're different." Well, you know what? We're not different. The same issues that we have in workforce development exist in education and health and housing. All of us are struggling with the same

challenges. And one of the things that I've noticed is that when it comes to organizing at the provider level, it's very loose. And so you might come together maybe once or twice a year, but you don't have the opportunities that, let's say, the funders through the funders collaboratives or other stakeholders have.

And so somehow or another, if we could build a system or a means of connecting at that grassroots level, because change doesn't come from the top, it comes from the bottom. And until we start bringing together the worker bees in our system to really recognize our voices, it's like when we did the session on worker voice and giving voice to the workers, the same thing applies here. Let us woman up, man up, come together, and build those coalitions that will ultimately result in the partnerships, in funding that is more realistic for the providers of the services. And I think that that would go a long way in helping what I call our industry.

Maggie Martinelli (36:07)

I'll add that I think the thing that people don't want to say in this is that you have to be able to, as an organization and as individuals working in this field, you have to be willing to humble yourself, allow others to be able to potentially take credit. You have to allow your toes to be stepped on a little, because you can't get it right the first time. And I think some partners are more willing to allow that to happen than others. But I think that, we think a lot when we were doing a lot of our work around our initiative, NEPA Moves, which really focused on the transportation challenges in our community, which was one of our major first forays into community impact work, because it's just such a massive challenge in our community. We really have an almost non-existent public transit system. And because of our proximity to a lot of cities, we have a lot of people that come here from New York and Philadelphia and are just shocked at how terrible our transit system is.

So that's where we started, and then we realized, well, okay, well, it's clearly not just transportation, and we began to diversify. But it started even within transportation. If you're going to bring a bunch of people together from different sectors with different priorities, and maybe sectors that have maybe been blaming each other for why they're the cause of certain issues at hand, whatever the perception is, we had to go about it with this mindset of, to some degree, I don't want to say don't care what's bringing you to the table, but whatever gets you to the table, come to the table. Just come. Let's have these conversations. And as the convening organization, we have to be prepared to say, "I already do that, and why are they trying to do this? And why are you even bringing us together? And what does a community foundation care about this for?"

You have to be ready to field some of that and be able to humble yourself and just be like, you take it, in a sense. But you have to do it because you're going to get to that greater good. And you have to model what you would want others to do. And it takes years, sometimes. Certain organizations, it's taken years for us to get to the point where we can just have open, honest conversations about, we're not a workforce agency. We will never be a workforce agency. We have no interest in being a workforce agency. We just want to create a better good for our community, a greater working environment.

So how can we get this done? What are your challenges? What are your challenges? Let's talk through this. Let's just be open and honest, and let's find out that we probably have far more in common than we have difference, and we can find ways to work together, and we don't all have to love each other

and sing Kumbaya, but that doesn't mean that we're not capable of working together. But again, you have to emulate the humbleness that you expect others to also bring.

Sheila Maguire (39:21)

Thank you. Thank you, Maggie and Windy, and more to come. Dee, do we have a few...? We have some questions, I know?

Dee Wallace (39:32)

What we have is a great deal of resonance to both of you about the notion of partnership and collaboration, and a great deal of gratitude about how you're expressing the urgency around that. One question would be, fairly pragmatically, how would you, as funders, recommend that those of us in the ecosystem signal in our proposals and our applications that we are willing to commit to being in partnership and collaboration, and recognizing that that actually takes time and effort? How do you make the case to, as you had mentioned, your executive committee, etc, that this glue money, financing support of collaboration, is important?

Maggie Martinelli (40:27)

I'll say, like any non-profit organization, we are run by a board that is volunteer and that does not do this on the day-to-day. We're blessed that our community foundation has a really understanding board that we're able to communicate what we're doing. The thing is, and it creates a level of vulnerability, which I don't think is easy to ask of any applicants, but you have to be a little bit vulnerable to say, "We do these things really well, but these things we do not, and this is where we're looking for support, and we're willing to go and find what we need to make us stronger as a whole. We're committed to this program. We're so committed to this that we're willing to tell you, we don't do this part well, but we're willing to go out and work with another agency, and they're coming in with us."

And to me, it's probably scary to admit to a funder about something that you're not good at, but at the same time, I think the vast majority of funders would look at that actually more favorably. We don't expect you to be everything. So being open with us about where you need support and how we can support those connections and those collaborations are really only going to benefit you. And I can only really speak to myself and some of the funders that we get to work with. I can't say... But that's also in the relationship-building you should make with your funders.

Windy Deese (42:03)

I agree. The relationship is key. I worked in corporate before I saw the light, and one of the things that was stunning for me was how accessible funders were, how basically they're giving you everything that you need to be successful in your approach to them, and it's just a matter of standing up for who you are and being vulnerable. It's okay to be vulnerable. You would be surprised at a response that you could get when you're just straight up honest and sincere about what your needs are and what you're trying to do.

I remember, in working with a foundation when I was in Pennsylvania, and they had given us, I think it was maybe \$50,000 to run a program. By the end of the program year, we hadn't even begun. And I told my board, "Hey, look, we're going to have to return it because we didn't do what we said we were

going to do." And I reached out to the funder and I said, "Look, we really wanted to initiate this, but we just couldn't do it." We didn't have the capacity at that time. That funder wrote back and said, "Keep the money and use it any way you want."

You can't really... You're not going to minimize your organization by simply letting us... If they don't know, they can't respond. And as long as we're perpetrating this myth that, oh, we got it going on and we're going to do this, we're going to do this, and we're going to do that, and you're not doing it a hundred percent, you're not doing yourself or your organization any good. So just be honest about where you are and what your needs are, and you might be surprised at what comes back.

Maggie Martinelli (44:15)

Windy, I know we're about to wrap, but I just want to add on to exactly what you said and to echo that a little bit, because I do think it is... You have to be willing to share, because that's how we know, that's how we learn, that's how we're able to respond and further build your capacity is knowing where you're lacking in capacity. That's how we can do this. But I think we also have to put the challenge back to the funders as well. We have to recognize the power dynamics of being a funder versus being a fundee, a grantee. That as funders, we are the ones perceived, actual or whatever, we're the ones with the power. And so it really has to actually start with funders to... Are you creating a trusting relationship? Are you actually listening? You might say you are. Are you really listening to what their needs are, and are you actually responding to what the needs are? And take an honest look at yourself and be willing to look at yourself as well. And are you sharing in the power with your grantees and with your community?

Sheila Maguire (45:23)

Thank you both so very much. I feel inspired, and I know from the chat that so do many of the participants who joined us today. Thank you for joining us. There is an after party if you just have to keep on talking to Windy and Maggie. You can click on the...someone will help me with the actual...click on the link that comes up, and join us for another 15 minutes of chat. Bring your drink with you, and if you have the time, see in the after party. If not, our next session is February 1st, where the chamber in Memphis will be talking about their experiences in capacity-building in the workforce ecosystem. Thank you.

Maggie Martinelli (46:04)

Thank you.

Windy Deese (46:06)

Thank you.