



## Newsletter

**Spring 2011**

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**Letter from the Executive Director**  
**Designing for Serendipity**  
**by John Esterle, Executive Director**

Monitor Institute's Diana Scarce's notion of "designing for serendipity" strikes a chord in me, not just in terms of TWI's work and perspective, but because Fred Whitman, TWI's founder, loved the word (defined as "an aptitude for making desirable discoveries by accident").

Fred hoped serendipity would always be something that was part of TWI's organizational culture. The spirit of serendipity is alive and well at our retreats when the TWI community comes together to cross-fertilize ideas and experience, but I also think it's present in other efforts we're involved with too – including things you'll read about in this spring edition of our newsletter.

For the past three years, TWI's grants portfolio has been committed with a number of multi-year grants.

While we have been especially glad to provide continuity of support in a difficult economy, as a small foundation the downside is we haven't been able to fund new opportunities that presented themselves. Consequently, when our board met in March to discuss the year ahead, we thought it important to create a better balance between ongoing support and new funding.

Our newsletter starts with Jill Blair, TWI's Board President, reporting on why we decided to increase next year's grants budget from \$800,000 to \$1,000,000 and discusses this decision's implications for TWI's future. We believe the default assumption within philanthropy that foundations should exist in perpetuity merits deep, and continual, questioning and reflection. In that context, I hope Jill's announcement is circulated widely.

Something else I hope gets passed around is Pia Infante's invitation to visit and comment on TWI's blog. In our fall newsletter, I wrote, "How to weave our growing network together as we go forward is a question TWI is eager to explore." By incorporating an ongoing mix of guest contributors from the TWI community, we think the blog is proving a creative experiment in answering that question.

[The Conversation Lab](#) is another experiment in cross-perspective dialogue (between grant makers and nonprofit leaders) that I've been gratified to be a part of – and one I'm pleased to see continue. It's always challenging to try and capture in words the power of experiential processes, but Cynthia Chavez of LeaderSpring, with Hugh Vasquez, does an admirable job of telling this story in their new article featured in this edition. Not to sound like a broken record, but I hope it gets pushed out as well to a range of networks within the independent sector.

[Connected Citizens: The Power, Peril, and Promise of Networks](#) is a thoughtful new report from The Knight Foundation and The Monitor Institute. In it, Diana Scarce writes about the importance of "designing for serendipity" when it comes to building effective networks. In short, she makes the case for convening without a clearly defined outcome. Rather, you put your trust in the people and the process.

Building off these themes of dialogue, networks, and telling stories I hope you find of interest the work of three of our grantees highlighted in this edition. I continue to be inspired by the people and organizations it is our honor and privilege to support and I look forward to new collaborations as the next chapter in TWI's story unfolds.

That this story may have an ending down the road is beginning to affect my thinking, not in ways that I can really articulate yet, but something is shifting – and in ways I hope prove serendipitous.

## **Announcement from the Board President**

### **What Now? Why Now? Spending Aggressively Because We Must**

**by Jill Blair, Board President, TWI**

At TWI, we on the board, have the great benefit of a “boots on the ground” Executive Director. John is not just a passionate advocate for the work; he is a passionate participant. By design, he spends a significant amount of time in the field with our grantees – our great collaborators –creating connections, building knowledge and always listening to learn. On a quarterly basis the board of TWI meets in person and we hear from John about all that he sees – about the accomplishments our grantees achieve and the challenges they face; about the needs that are emerging; and the efforts and energies of our philanthropic colleagues. John advises us on the state of the field and the conditions that demand our attention and ready action.

Since our grantee reflection session in October of 2010, John has been monitoring and reporting to us about the effect of the economic downturn on the sector as a whole, and on our grantees in particular. He has raised this issue consistently – expressing his belief that during these times especially, it is important that we at TWI maintain our level of giving. “We exist not to persist, “he explains, “but to be agents of positive change by our giving of funds.”

With this counsel, the TWI board approved a 2011-12 budget that not only sustains but also increases our level of giving (which already exceeded the 5% payout expectation). We are doing so with the understanding that at this rate of giving we are diminishing our endowment and jeopardizing our potential to exist in perpetuity. We are doing so with an appreciation that our responsibility is greater now than it has ever been to work with our grantees on plans for their future – and to be creative in considering ways of sustaining keystone organizations and efforts. We also believe it is important to be responsive in the current environment – an explanation for why we are creating space in our portfolio for new investments.

While we have not established a horizon for TWI, nor have we officially agreed to a sunset policy, we understand the implications of the decisions we are making. In late August, the board will be meeting over two days to focus on how to achieve our ambitions with the resources and time we may have left. As Franklin D. Roosevelt said during the Great Depression, “There are many ways to move forward, but only one way of standing still.”

## **If You Blog It, They Will Come**

**by Pia Infante**

In December 2010, John and I made a TWI New Year’s Resolution to post a blog every Wednesday, rain or shine. We’re proud to report that as of May 2011, we haven’t missed a beat. From John’s latest query about making [time for learning](#); to TWI board member CJ Callen’s thoughtful piece on [words that matter](#); to grantee/ partner Luz Santa’s recent missive on strategies for [skill building](#), we’ve offered

something to our online readership every Wednesday of 2011.

I'm delighted to report that as we've built it, you (and apparently a host of others) have come. Comparing stats from 2010, our blog readership more than doubled in 2011. Not only is it satisfying to see a weekly practice and New Year's resolution fulfilled, it is also wonderful to remain in touch with the wider TWI circle and new friends.

We hope you'll make a habit of checking out the blog. And if you haven't yet made a contribution, this is an official invitation to do so. We'd love to hear from you.

### **Conversation Lab: An Experiment in Funder/Practitioner Dialogues by Cynthia Chavez**

How many times have you attended a valuable conference, training or workshop and wished that you had the time to share highlights of the experience with your friends or peers, let alone write about it? Thanks to John Esterle's encouragement and support, I was able to set aside time to write about my experiences as a participant in the six-month dialogue series, The Conversation Lab. What a treat it was to have time to think more deeply about the topics we discussed and to reflect on the insights and perspectives of my fellow participants. I welcome your comments on the [article](#).

### **Spreading Passion for Science by Deanne Stone**

For most Americans, the story of humans and dinosaurs living on the same land at the same time is preposterous and refuted by scientific evidence. But for a segment of the U.S. population, the scientific evidence is inadequate and the story is accepted without question.

In 2006, an eclectic group of scientists and concerned citizens gathered at the University of California Museum of Paleontology on the Berkeley campus to discuss the growing anti-science sentiment in the U.S. The National Science Foundation funded the workshop, and the upshot was the creation of COPUS, The Coalition on the Public Understanding of Science.

"The scientific community was baffled by the increasing attacks on legitimate science," says Judy Scotchmoor, one of the project managers of the COPUS Network Project. "We asked ourselves what we could do to counter the misinformation and negative attitudes."

COPUS fashioned a three-pronged approach to building connections among scientists and the general public: developing a COPUS community, celebrating the contributions of science to society, and promoting dialogues and information-sharing to spark curiosity about how science works and why it matters.

COPUS is a grassroots effort that welcomes anyone who wants to participate in its activities—with one stipulation: participants agree that with the statement that “science proposes natural explanations for how the world works and tests those explanations by making observations of the natural world; scientific explanations must be predictive and hence, falsifiable or testable; and science is an intellectual and social endeavor.”

COPUS began by setting up a Web site ([www.copusproject.org](http://www.copusproject.org)) and registering individuals around the country to join the COPUS Network. The grassroots approach to organizing took off. Over the next few years, people enthusiastic about science formed regional and thematic hubs. Additional funding from the National Science Foundation paid workshops that resulted in the development of a Hub Toolkit with information and suggestions for engaging more people in hub activities. By the end of 2009, 21 local, regional, and national hubs were in full swing.

2009 marked the 200th anniversary of the birth of Charles Darwin, and COPUS geared up for a national, yearlong, grassroots celebration not only of evolution but also of all the sciences. Under the banner of “How We Know What We Know” COPUS chose a different theme or discipline each month, and scientific organizations around the country organized related activities and events. “The Year of Science ‘09 was a great success,” says Judy. “Professional societies helped us find appropriate content and arranged cross-disciplinary collaborations of scientists and organizations that hadn’t worked together before.”

People-to-people contacts are the key to COPUS’s success in stimulating interest in science. These are exemplified by science cafes proliferating around the country. People get together to talk about topics of interest in plain language and usually invite a local expert to kick off the discussion. And for those who enjoy attending outdoor festivals, there’s even a Science Festival Alliance to direct them to festivals in their communities or, if they’re planning vacations with children, to festivals around the world.

COPUS highlights the fun side of science by reaching out to children in ways that excite their minds and imaginations. Kids have been invited to participate in naming a new species, joining in a scientific pizza contest, and contributing photos to photos contests. The Small Science Collective, a project started by Andrew Yang, a science professor at the Art Institute of Chicago, caught COPUS’s attention. Yang has his students design free single-sheet “zines” that combine art and science information, and leave them around town. Yang’s idea has inspired similar projects internationally and spurred COPUS to hold a zine contest open to individuals of all ages. It received 800 contributions from around the world. Be sure to check out the terrific winners at <http://www.yearofscience2009.org/about/zine-winners.html>.

Although COPUS is not yet a household name, it has set off ripples locally and around the country. Judy sees plenty of evidence of COPUS’s influence on the Berkeley campus: the Science at CAL group that brings together people working in different fields for conversation, the recent campus science festival, the participation of science departments in the annual CAL Day celebration, and the CEO (Coordination of Education and Outreach) brown-bag lunches where interested individuals swap ideas on improving science outreach to the public. For now, COPUS is focusing most of its energy on preparing for the Bay

Area Science Festival scheduled for this year.

“The joy of this work is meeting so many people equally committed to creating a scientifically literate society, a questioning society,” says Judy. “Our strength is as a network, and we believe that the best chance of changing the way Americans perceive science is through person-to-person contacts.”

## **Education Top Concern of Millennials**

**by Deanne Stone**

For nearly a decade, [Mobilize.org](http://Mobilize.org) has been putting into practice its commonsense philosophy: young people learn about democracy by participating in it. This past April it convened a group of 100 students at the Hilton Hotel in San Jose. All were Millennials (Mobilize.org’s target population born between 1976 and 1996) enrolled in state community colleges in northern California. And all were keenly interested in the topic: generating ideas for boosting community college graduation rates.

Mobilize.org identified getting a college degree as the top concern of Millennials and, in particular, the community college population. Many are the first in their families to go to college and almost all are struggling to finance their educations. “We want to make sure that this generation of young people have the education they need to compete in the job market and be economically stable,” says Maya Enista, CEO of Mobilize.org. “We’re focusing on community college students this year because they face the biggest obstacles in getting a college degree.”

That’s certainly the case in California where students’ personal difficulties have been compounded by the state’s massive deficit and deep cuts to community college budgets. The California community college system used to be one of the best in the country, but today the statistics are discouraging. Some 3million students enroll in the 112 community college campuses each year, yet less than a third earn an associate arts degree or transfer to a four-year college. And of those who do succeed, more than half take six years to finish the two-year program.

Mobilize.org’s strategy of building partnerships with Millennials whose voices are least heard was evident at this year’s Democracy 2.0 Summit and Competition. More than half of the participants came from immigrant families whose first language was not English, others were undocumented, and some had transitioned from foster care. Few had any previous leadership experience in their schools or in their communities.

The Democracy 2.0 Summits—this is Mobilize.org’s 10th—are designed to give young people the tools and confidence to tackle problems that affect them and make the changes they want to see. Students from the different college campuses formed teams, and together they worked through the process of brainstorming and prioritizing ideas and, finally, designing a plan of action. The teams presented their proposals for raising community college graduation rates to the full group of participants, who then cast

individual votes for the most promising ideas.

Besides awarding up to \$7,500 for each of the five best proposals chosen by the participants, Mobilize.org offers a year of professional advice on implementing the plan. Winning proposals ranged from setting up networking and counseling programs for undocumented and former foster care students to educating community college students on building alliances and lobbying state legislators to increase funding for higher education.

For the first time this year, Mobilize.org added a Viewers' Choice Award to allow young people who hadn't attended the Summit to vote for their favorites. Partnering with a group called Spark Action, an online clearinghouse of youth civic engagement and grassroots action, Mobilize.org gave all the teams an additional week to rally supporters to vote for their proposal. The surprise winner was Project Unity, a group from Sierra College that proposed replicating a successful community college scholars program to reverse the high dropout rate among African-American and other minorities.

"This was a great example of grassroots mobilizing," says Maya. "They didn't get the votes from the people in the room, but they mobilized their network to get them to the top." You can read the winners' proposals and view their one-minute video pitches at <http://mobilize.org/get-involved/democracy-2-0/awardees/>

The annual summit is just one of Mobilize.org's projects. Headquartered in Washington, DC, it works year-round in developing networks of young change makers to address the most pressing issues facing Millennials in their communities. Until recently, Mobilize.org had concentrated on five cities: San Jose, Philadelphia, Charlotte, Miami, and Detroit. Now, with a recent \$1-million grant from the Knight Foundation, it can expand its work with young people to additional cities. "This grant will allow us to hire new staff and offer more resources and support in the different cities over the next three years," says Maya.

When Maya became Mobilize.org's CEO in 2008, she set a goal of raising the organization's budget to \$1 million a year. Now that she has surpassed that goal, what comes next? "As we've grown, Mobilize.org has less and less to do with me and more to do with the amazing team of young people who put these programs together," says Maya. "That's the exciting and awesome part of my job. Now I'm having fun setting other goals we can reach."

## **Free Online Media Tool Kit**

**by Deanne Stone**

Financially strapped individuals and nonprofits that have lacked the time and resources to keep up with new media and technology are in luck. A new Web site, [www.newmediatoolkit.org](http://www.newmediatoolkit.org) lives up to its name. Beginners and pros alike can choose among tutorials in video, social media, monitoring and metrics, blogging, audio, and SEO (search engine optimization). The easy-to-navigate Web site was created to

meet the needs of ethnic and community media, but just about any person or nonprofit organization can pick up practical tips for getting their stories and messages out more effectively and to more people.

The Web site was created by the Renaissance Journalism Center (RJC), a project of San Francisco State University's Journalism Department, and grew out of its work with nonprofit organizations involved in its New Media Lab & Incubation Project. In that project, RJC helped five national nonprofit organizations increase their proficiency in using digital and social media. RJC hopes more nonprofit organizations, community/ethnic media outlets, and community groups take advantage of the New Media Toolkit. Check out the Web site to see how it can benefit your organization. And then be sure to spread the word through your social media network. Feel free to copy and post this announcement on your Web site.

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Use a facilitator. Skilled facilitators are neutral and know how to translate conflict and anger into specific interests needs and concerns so that what's behind the emotion can be understood and addressed.

Establish ground rules or agreements that serve as a golden rule for everyone present. With these agreements, participants are more likely to be heard and to hear one another.

Bring together different interest groups to talk to one another through a structured process. For example, organize participants into smaller groups to ensure each person gets the chance to speak and to make it unlikely that one person or interest group will dominate the meeting.

Diligently record what citizens say, and be clear about how you plan to use their input. Throughout the meeting, reflect back the concerns, values and desires you are hearing.

We encouraged NCDD members to use and build on the articles and flyer for their own op-eds, letters and hand-outs, and dozens of them did. You're welcome to use them as well to help leaders engage the public more effectively in the future. Citizens have higher expectations than ever for a government that is of, by and for the people, and it's high time for an upgrade in the way we do politics.

## TWI Grantees in the Spotlight

Eboo Patel, founder and executive director of Interfaith Youth Core, was named one of “America’s Best Leaders of 2009” by U.S. News & World Report in association with the Center for Public Leadership at Harvard Kennedy’s School of Government.

<http://www.usnews.com/articles/news/best-leaders/2009/10/22/eboo-patel-obama-faith-adviser-preaches-religious-tolerance.html>

Maya Enista, CEO of Mobilize.org, was named one of “50 Visionaries Who are Changing the World” by Utne magazine.

<http://www.utne.com/print-article.aspx?id=2147485477>

Mobilize.org's leadership was honored by the San Francisco Bay Area and Washington, DC chapters of the Young Nonprofit Professionals Network (YNPN).

### It’s Our Democracy, and It’s Time to Act

By Ian Storrar

Chief Operating Officer, Mobilize.org

Thanks to the support of the Whitman Institute, our CEO, Maya Enista, and I have been developing Mobilize.org as a center for thought leadership on how the Millennial Generation, born between 1976 and 1996, can upgrade our democracy. We’ve seen young leaders across our nation taking their entrepreneurial spirit to the social sector and forging innovative pathways to solve the problems of today and build the democracy of tomorrow. We are about to hold our 6th Democracy 2.0 Summit in

Chicago to address the systemic barriers to our generation's fiscal health, where we will invest in Millennial-led solutions to upgrade the way our democracy works. It's an exciting time for Mobilize.org and Millennials. As we enter the second decade of the millennium, Mobilize.org and Millennials everywhere look forward to doing more to improve our communities in ways we may not have imagined before.

Below is the text of the testimony Ian Storrar gave at a recent meeting of the YNPN (Young Nonprofit Professionals Network), held in Washington, DC and hosted by the White House in the Eisenhower Executive Office Building. The subject was "Serving Today and Shaping Tomorrow".

"I am a Millennial. Like so many of my peers committed to serving others, in their communities or in unknown corners of the world, I feel called to the life of public service. In my daily work I have the great privilege to continue the struggle for a fairer and more just society that includes all voices and serves all people. I am fortunate to have been able to create a vision for that society in a unique and modern way. In the first few years of my working life, I have been part of the movement to develop and achieve this vision. Through the tools of the Internet and participatory decision-making I've joined others from across the country to craft the Democracy 2.0 Declaration based on the input and ideas of thousands of Millennials. In the declaration, our generation states, "We realize that as young people we are expected to be the leaders of tomorrow, but we understand that as citizens we are called to be the leaders of today." This signals the kind of work we do today to change – indeed, upgrade - the way our democracy works, which is essential to the success of our hopes for tomorrow. The leaders who meet at the White House today are already building that vision. As we gather in celebration of our work to address the systemic barriers facing tomorrow's generation of leaders, I am proud to be among their company."

#### PACE Announces New Publication

PACE has just released its latest white paper, *An Inequitable Invitation to Citizenship: Non-College Bound Youth and Civic Engagement*, an examination of the gap in public and civic involvement between college-bound youth and non-college-bound youth. The philanthropic community has invested huge resources in trying to understand what motivates college-bound youth to become more involved in public life, but it has not had a similar conversation about how to engage the 50 percent of youth who don't go to college. The publication is aimed not only at funders, but also at federal and state governments, schools and school systems, higher education, the military, political/advocacy organizations, community institutions, and businesses. A pdf version of the white paper is available at:

<http://www.pacefunders.org/publications/NCBY.pdf>. Check PACE's Web site for the date of its upcoming Webnair on which the authors will discuss their research and findings.

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