

MAKING CONNECTIONS-DENVER
Community Learning Network
Community Research Team

ANALYSIS OF
THE MAKING CONNECTIONS-DENVER (MC-D) PERCEPTION SURVEYS

Background of the MC-D Perception Survey

In May 2006, MC-D staff requested that the Community Learning Network (CLN) design an anonymous questionnaire and administer them to multiple MC-D stakeholders. The three-question survey aimed to get the perceptions and opinions of residents, partner organizations, and staff so that MC-D can better create a strategic plan for 2007 and beyond 2010.

The research questions are:

- 1) From your perspective, what is Making Connections—Denver?
- 2) What do you think Making Connections—Denver should look like in the next four years?
- 3) What do you think Making Connections—Denver should look like beyond 2010 when the initiative ends?

The first question attempted to gain a baseline understanding of what multiple stakeholders have thought thus far of what MC-D is and does, while the other questions attempt to gain perceptions of what stakeholders feel about MC-D's future direction and the changes that need to take place in present time.

Through these questions, the CLN hoped to gain insight into MC-D stakeholders' desired outcomes and goals for the future of MC-D, especially as MC-D transitions into a local management entity model where the Annie E. Casey Foundation's role will drastically change into an "engaged investor" role.

Survey Methodology

The CLN, community researchers, and evaluation consultants Daniel Brisson and Jean East, came up with three open-ended qualitative questions that are simple and quick for administration, yet can yield complex, in-depth, and honest responses without leading respondents towards "socially desirable" answers. The anonymity promised to respondents also helped to achieve these goals.

During preliminary analysis of Wave I surveys, the CLN recognized a need for an additional fourth question that asks respondents to identify themselves as belonging to one of the following categories. These broad categories of MC-D stakeholders add another layer of results in that they helped to see if there are significant differences or commonalities between and among these stakeholders:

- Paid staff (including consultants)
- Resident (volunteers – unpaid)
- Organizational partner
- Resident staff
- Funder
- Intern
- Other (explain)

Sample of Respondents

As noted above, Wave I survey did not request respondents to identify themselves. However, this was done in Wave II and the make-up of respondents is as follows:

Paid staff (including consultants)	2
Resident (volunteers – unpaid)	4
Organizational partner	6
Resident staff	0
Funder	0
Intern	0
Other (friend of staff, visitor to MC-D, supporter of MC-D)	5
Blank or not specified	4
Total (Wave II only)	21

Data Collection

Wave I

CLN staff administered Wave I of the surveys to groups such as the CLN, MC-D staff and partners, and the FES Guidance Group. Seventeen (17) surveys were returned in a period of four weeks.

Wave II

Surveys were administered by the community researchers during a public open house of MC-D in October 2006. Twenty-one (21) questionnaires were administered and collected.

Analysis and Interpretation of Collected Data

In July 2006, the CLN and community researchers grouped (coded) common words, phrases, and concepts that relate to the survey questions that respondents stated. Next, the group pulled out notably common themes.

Wave I data were first coded, themed and analyzed by the CLN and Community Research Team (CRT) with assistance from evaluation consultant Daniel Brisson. Verbatim responses were grouped into categories. Next, responses from both waves were compiled and analyzed by community researchers. Although there are a number of different themes that emerged from Wave II that were not evident in Wave I, most responses were similar and hence were categorized according to Wave I responses.

Jean East facilitated a session to interpret the categorized themes with MC-D staff in the fall of 2006. Overall, MC-D staff found that the themes that emerged are congruent with what staff expectations of stakeholders' perception of MC-D.

Results

Identity and Purpose

Wave I and II responses to the survey revealed two prominent themes. One theme speaks to the identity of MC-D while the other to its purpose. The two are intertwined and cannot be contextualized without one another.

For identity, respondents' perceptions vary from "an initiative" or a "localized version of the Annie E. Casey Foundation (AECF)," to more conceptual ideas such as "a catalyst for systems change" and "a way to connect people."

For purpose, responses also varied widely. Although MC-D's required core result work with AECF is not explicitly stated by respondents, many do perceive the following components as part of MC-D's purpose of work:

- Quality schools, including early childhood education
- Access to quality jobs, education, financial development
- Leadership development and resident involvement

However, of the 38 responses, only nine respondents used the exact wording of AECF's "core results". Instead, "community" emerged as a widely shared concept by most respondents. Twenty-nine responses indicate that MC-D's purpose and work are centered around:

- A resident-led movement
- Helping the community through programs

The Present and Near Future

In term of its present and near future, respondents indicated that MC-D's focus for the next four years (up to 2010) should be working with the Baker, Cole, La Alma/N. Lincoln Park and Sun Valley neighborhoods. The neighborhood names were not necessarily referred to by most respondents (only seven of 38 responses).

According to the majority of respondents, MC-D should take action to be more well-known and articulate its identity more clearly and explicitly, both internally and externally. MC-D should also be more visible and clear in its articulation of its neighborhoods services, programs, resources, and community organizing work. In return, these efforts would lead to empowering residents and increasing the number of residents in the initiative, keeping the vision of MC-D "resident-driven." The "passing on" or "handing over" of the initiative to local residents and organizations is explicitly stated in responses such as:

- "Stay true to the resident-driven philosophy from which you have strayed."
- "Give *MC-D* back to the community."
- "The power should slowly be handed over to residents and local non-profits."
- "What do residents think the next steps and projects should be?"

There are two responses above that are noteworthy in regard to MC-D's future direction. The statements, "stay true to the resident-driven philosophy from which you have strayed" and "give MC-D back to the community," were both generated from MC-D staff.

The Future

Respondents overwhelmingly articulated the need for more direct services and programs, especially in economic and financial development (adult education, job training, etc). However, it is feverishly articulated that in providing those services and programs, a resident-led approach must be utilized by MC-D and other organizations. Respondents also strongly indicated that these services and programs should be managed and implemented with the needs of residents in mind, first and foremost, by constantly reaching out directly to them about their needs and concerns.

Services and programs should also expand beyond the boundaries of the four neighborhoods. This thinking is in alignment with the high mobility and constant change of characteristics of MC-D's residents. According to Wave II (2005) of the AECF Cross-site Household surveys, MC-D neighborhoods have a mobility rate of 64 percent (for households with children), the highest rate among all MC-D sites. Further, as partner organizations and MC-D expand into the policy arena, respondents articulate the necessity of the work to extend and make an impact beyond geographically defined neighborhoods.

Systems Change and Sustainability

Only two of all 38 respondents specifically used the word "change." However, more respondents (seven) mentioned that relationship-building among and between residents, staff, and partner organizations is critical for the growth and success of MC-D. One respondent stated a need for a "leap from small, disconnected efforts to a policy change agenda."

The long-term sustainability of MC-D emerged in 11 responses. Some of the responses recommended that "new sources of funding needs to be found," and MC-D should "look for more grants." Another respondent stated, "if it [MC-D] plans for sustainability – the non-profits/agencies should carry on the work." There are four "not sure" responses and three respondents had no response.

Limitations

Thirty-eight surveys were collected (for both waves) and as such might not have sufficiently covered the broad realm of MC-D stakeholders. However, the qualitative nature of the questionnaire provided rich, detailed, and valid responses that can definitely be of utility for MC-D's strategic planning work.

Recommendations for Further Research and Evaluation

As MC-D moves to a new management model that is based and governed locally, it is imperative that all stakeholders' voices are elicited and their responses analyzed. The most notable point is that stakeholders perceive services and programs are needed to for meeting the financial needs of low-income residents. However, respondents also indicate a keen awareness

that in order to reach systemic policy changes, there needs to be a focus on empowering residents at the neighborhood level.

Overall, although residents, staff, and organizational partners may have different attitudes and perceptions about what MC-D is, does, or should do (as evident in this analysis), the overwhelming consensus was that the responsibilities and rewards of MC-D's future work should be shared by all.

The CLN and CRT recommend that the MC-D Partners and site coordinator use these findings to inform the future direction of the initiative in Denver. Additionally, the CLN and CRT recommend periodic administration of the same survey in order to track stakeholders' perceptions over time. The reasons for periodic administration are:

- 1) The questionnaire is anonymous and hence elicits candid responses.
- 2) The questionnaire is brief and hence easy and efficient to administer and collect from all stakeholders.
- 3) The first two waves of administration yielded valid responses and hence proved the validity of research questions. Increased administration would further enhance its validity.
- 4) Responses revealed critical data for MC-D that are of tremendous relevance in guiding MC-D into the future.

Significant Examples of Verbatim Responses (Grouped According to Themes)

QUESTION 1: From your perspective, what is Making Connections-Denver?

Common themes

Community

Code words/phrases

» Sun Valley, Baker, La Alma/N. Lincoln Park, Cole

» Residents

» Neighborhoods

A point of resource

» Helps people get informed

» Access to information

» Obtaining resources

» A connector

» City agencies

» Community organizations

Low-income

» Poor people

» Disadvantaged

» Financial development

Empower towards change

» Organizes

» Empowers

» Resident involvement

» Promotes positive community

» Engages community residents

» Development

» Progress

[A] physical community
center

» Systems change

» A place to come

Significant Examples of Verbatim Responses (Grouped According to Themes)

QUESTION 2: What do you think Making Connections-Denver should look like in the next four years?

Common themes	Code words/phrases
Supportive relationships	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> » A “big brother” overseeing community organized activities » Local organizations should be supported by MC-D » Increase partnerships » Work organically with the neighborhood » Continue to get into the neighborhood » Well-known throughout the community » An interactive community relationship building initiative » More community involvement » Residents and local organizations should be supported by MC-D » Pull together partners » More community-outreach programs » Put in place some network for change » Strong relationships » Organizing efforts with/between communities and outside forces » Continue with work in the community, increase visibility, increase partnerships
Resident-driven agenda Residents Community-focus	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> » Committed to the people » Initiatives and actions taken on by more residents » Residents should be taking ownership » Initiative needs to empower residents » Stay true to resident-driven philosophy » More active community involvement » What do residents think are the next steps and projects?
Services and resources	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> » Clearing house for information and resources » Neighborhood will use the resources » A support organizations that helps people find resources, social, mental, financial, neighbors, etc. » Making Connections office and staff will be a resource
Power	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> » Slowly hand over power to residents and local NP’s » Use its power
Staff	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> » Be well known through out the community » Use diverse skills to get out in the field more
Sustainability/Systems change Growth	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> » A catalyst for systems change leap from small disconnected efforts to a connected policy change » Bigger » Expand its efforts » Keep doing the work that it’s involved in » Expected to change to a sustaining organization » Plan for the future » Keep going » Focus on direct work » Community leadership could be expanded » Be well known through out the community » A stronger focus to/towards economic self-supporting programs
Evaluation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> » Continue with work in the community, increase visibility, increase partnerships » Provide research and data analysis to assist in the development » Work on data and results you already have » Use evaluation as a tool » Complete the evaluation and find a way and find a way to get the information gathered and out to the community

Significant Examples of Verbatim Responses (Grouped According to Themes)

QUESTION 3:

What do you think Making Connections-Denver should look like beyond 2010 when the initiative ends?

Common themes

Resources

Code words/phrases

- » Aware of all resources
- » Know about MC-D resources
- » Help with funding
- » Computer classes
- » Skills/job training
- » Help kids & family
- » New jobs
- » Incubate new businesses
- » Effect neighborhood economics
- » Assist local residents

Resident-driven

- » A place
- » Residents
- » Taken up by neighborhood residents
- » Residents continue the work
- » Power to residents
- » Empowerment
- » Neighborhood change
- » Engrained in community
- » Not distinguishable from the neighborhood

Public relations

- » Self supporting
- » Well known
- » Better familiarity
- » Liaison
- » Relationship and structure among stakeholders

APPENDIX A

WAVE I

Making Connections—Denver Perception Survey Information Sheet

This is a project of Making Connections—Denver Staff and the Community Learning Network. The information gathered from this survey will help guide our future strategic planning.

Please take five minutes to complete this survey and return it to a MC-D staff member. If you are returning it by mail, please place in return envelope and mail within 2 days.

The results will be available in August, 2006.

Thank you for your participation!



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APPENDIX A

WAVE II

Making Connections—Denver Perception Survey Information Sheet

This is a project of Making Connections—Denver Staff and the Community Learning Network. The information gathered from this survey will help guide MC-D's future strategic planning.

Please take five minutes to complete this survey and return it to a MC-D staff member. If you are returning it by mail, please place in return envelope and mail within 2 days.

The results will be released on a regular basis as the CLN continues to collect and analyze completed surveys. Stay tune for upcoming reports!

Thank you for your participation!



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This research report was completed by Veronica Quezada and Phuonglan Nguyen. Significant work to collect and analyze data was completed by the Community Research Team (Susana Avelar-Recinos, Shelly Travis, Shaleec Thomas, Rosella Palacios, Joe Cordova, and Gitae Lee). Other contributors to the project include Suzanne Gruba, Candace RedShirt, Ms. Josie Acosta, and Phil Kaspar from the Community Learning Network.

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