

CHARTER FRIENDS NATIONAL NETWORK

connecting and supporting state-level charter school initiatives

MEMORANDUM

TO: Friends Group leaders and other Charter Friends
FROM: Jon Schroeder, Charter Friends National Network
DATE: October 11, 1999
RE: Update on Casey Initiative; opportunities to get involved

As you know from previous correspondence, the Charter Friends National Network is launching a two-year initiative to support a much larger and more general initiative being undertaken by the Annie E. Casey Foundation. The Casey initiative -- *Making Connections* -- is described in the enclosed Q&A backgrounder and will support broad strategies for neighborhood development and family transformation in 22 cities around the country. Those cities are:

Atlanta	Denver	Indianapolis	New Orleans	San Antonio	St. Louis
Baltimore	Des Moines	Louisville	Oakland	San Diego	Washington, D.C.
Boston	Detroit	Miami	Philadelphia	Savannah	
Camden	Hartford	Milwaukee	Providence	Seattle	

I want to emphasize -- up front -- that this is not a "charter school initiative," *per se*. It's a much larger initiative (Casey has committed as much as \$500.0 million over the next decade) to strengthen neighborhoods and strengthen families.

However, in major urban areas all around the country, good schools are being viewed as an essential ingredient in attracting and retaining families and strengthening communities. And, increasingly, charter schools are being viewed as one strategy to help improve teaching and learning -- both for students in individual charters and by using charters to help leverage and model improvements in nearby district public schools.

Charter Friends Network contributions to the Casey initiative

The Charter Friends Network has a two-year assignment from the Casey Foundation to help support this initiative in three ways. Each, in turn, offers opportunities for Friends Groups and others to get involved:

First, we will be completing an "environmental scan" which describes the legal and political climate for charters, the existing support infrastructure and current charter school activity in each of the 22 "Casey cities." This will be used to help educate Casey's "site teams" for each city about existing charter potential and activity and what might be needed to create a more favorable environment for charter school development.

A project of the Center for Policy Studies in cooperation with Hamline University

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For example, five of the 22 Casey cities are in states that don't currently have a charter school law (Baltimore, Des Moines, Indianapolis, Louisville and Seattle). Many of the other cities have strong laws and existing technical assistance capacity for charter development. But others have weaker laws and/or little current chartering or charter support activity.

Friends groups and others will be asked to help assemble information for this "environmental scan" including assessments of current charter activity and potential, lists of current and proposed charter schools, etc. As new developments occur, this "scan" will be regularly updated.

Second, we will be identifying and recruiting participants in one or more "networks" of experienced charter school leaders who can act as resources and mentors for newly emerging school leaders in Casey cities. One high priority network to be created will be charter operators and developers who have broad economic and community development experience and motives behind their schools.

Again, Friends Groups and others will be asked to recommend local charter leaders for participating in this and other networks -- as they are identified.

Finally, we will be developing a series of technical assistance tools and products for use by new charter developers in Casey cities. Based on the advice provided by a number of Friends Group leaders around the country, products will be developed in four areas in the first year, with additional areas and products to be identified for "year two." This part of our initiative is described in greater detail in the attached "Request for Statements of Interest in Developing Technical Assistance Resources for New Charter Schools."

The bottom line is that Friends Groups and others are being asked to **become directly involved in the initiative by developing these high priority technical assistance tools.**

It should be noted that our intent is to work with the Casey Foundation to make these technical assistance tools broadly available to the charter movement through Friends Groups -- not just in the 22 Casey cities, but wherever they are needed. At the same time, we'll be making available to charter developers in the Casey cities other technical assistance tools developed through other Charter Friends Network initiatives -- for example, tools on accountability, special education, facilities financing and public/media relations.

Overall supervision for this Charter Friends initiative is being provided by Bryan Hassel, who previously gave leadership to our initiatives of facilities financing, school designs and contracting for management services. Bryan is being assisted on this project by Michelle McNiff, former research director for the Public School Forum of North Carolina.

Questions about the enclosed "Request for Statements of Interest" should be directed to Michelle. But, if you have suggestions or general questions about the overall initiative, please give me a call at 651-649-5479.

js/att.

Request for Statements of Interest in Developing Technical Assistance Resources for New Charter Schools

Project Description

Over the next two years, the Charter Friends National Network will be assisting a major Annie E. Casey Foundation initiative in twenty-two major urban communities around the nation. Recognizing that strong families and strong neighborhoods are interdependent, the Casey Foundation is supporting broad strategies for neighborhood development and family transformation in these communities through its *Making Connections* initiative.

Though local residents will determine what strategies they pursue in each of the Casey cities, high quality schools are increasingly being viewed as a critical factor in building strong families and neighborhoods. And charter schools are increasingly being viewed as one strategy that could help achieve those goals -- both on their own and as strategies to leverage and model improvement in nearby district public schools.

In an effort to support these local efforts, the Charter Friends National Network will help ensure that technical assistance is available to community-based organizations as they develop and begin to operate charter schools in the *Making Connections* communities. As one initial step, the Charter Friends Network has identified four fundamental areas in need of technical assistance and is soliciting contractors who can create user-friendly tools for charter school developers during the initiative's first year. Additional products in other areas will be developed during the second year.

Products Needed

To provide the community-based organizations in the 22 neighborhoods with critical tools in the target areas (listed below), the Charter Friends National Network will select contractors who will develop user-friendly products that build on existing resources, as well as provide new information to fill in knowledge gaps. It is expected that each proposed product will detail the latest thinking about the topic and be rich with examples of actual charter school experience and practice.

In addition, the Friends Network is open to innovative approaches that will effectively convey information to charter school developers. Conventional technical assistance manuals are a possibility, but the Friends Network would like contractors to consider alternate approaches, such as:

- Printed and electronic guidebooks that consultants, Friends Groups and others can use to help school operators with the topics
- workshops and training sessions, including materials and "teaching notes"
- interactive technological applications that convey the information, including use of CD ROM technology, Web sites and other means
- video or audio-tape presentations of information

Budgets and timelines

The budget for developing each of these products will average \$15,000, though each exact budget will depend on its scope. This budget will cover only the development of the products; the costs of production and distribution will be financed separately. The precise timeline is also negotiable, but the Friends Network would expect a draft of the product to be completed by March 31, 2000.

Topics for the Four Products

The following descriptions are only suggestive – the Friends Network will work with the contractor to determine the particular form and detail of the proposed products.

1. Creating Effective Board Governance

Like other nonprofits, charter schools often face challenges in building effective boards of directors. Tensions among board members, conflict between board and staff, and non-functioning boards are among the problems that have plagued charter schools in many places. The nonprofit world is rich with workshop opportunities and guides on nonprofit board effectiveness. Local district boards of education usually are able to draw upon state school board associations for consultation and instruction. However, there is little specific guidance on the development and effectiveness of charter school boards.

This product should offer charter developers information on how to prepare and sustain board members to lead an autonomous public school. The product should build upon the best of nonprofit and district governance training and resources. The product could provide guidance in areas such as:

- Identification and recruitment of board members
- Orientation of board members
- Board roles and responsibilities
- Legal and financial issues of boards
- Board-staff relations, including evaluation of the school director
- Conflict management and resolution
- Board-community/parent relations
- Board member motivation and accountability
- Board meetings and the use of committees
- Board role in fund-raising
- Board self-assessment

2. Personnel Policies and Practices

Community-based activists are often unaware of the finer details of personnel policy and practice. Many lawsuits, staff discontent, and start-up difficulties could be avoided with the proper understanding of legal issues, as well as training for development of effective personnel policies. This product should address the major areas that should be covered in a charter school personnel policy manual, such as:

- sufficient summary of all key laws (ADA, COBRA, ERISA, FLSA, exempt vs. non-exempt, workers' compensation, etc.) and pertinent references to resources for additional information.
- instruction about how to "start from scratch" in areas like determining benefits and constructing a pay scale.
- basic training in how to write policies on compensation and benefits, recruitment, selection, performance evaluation, and termination.

3. Mobilizing and Motivating Staff to Get the Best Results

A charter school's most important resources are its people, and charter schools have a great deal of

flexibility in how they select, develop, organize, evaluate, and compensate their staffs. Yet many developers have little or no experience in how to capitalize on this autonomy to achieve their missions. And, too few charter schools have designed and implemented fundamentally new ways of mobilizing and motivating staff.

This tool will build on many of the same basic human resource areas listed in item two, above. But its primary purpose is to help charter school developers think creatively regarding their use of compensation and benefits, recruitment, selection, professional development, staff organization, retention and performance evaluation to best serve their schools' missions.

Unlike the product in item two, which provides instruction on the basic human resources policies and practices, this tool should be creative and visionary – teaching charter school developers to use their charter autonomy effectively. By identifying the best human resource practices in other charter schools, it should explore new models in areas such as:

- selection of staff.
- compensation.
- work arrangements.
- new ways of organizing and relating to staff, including contracting with worker cooperatives or staff organized as for- or non-profit management companies.
- professional development.
- evaluation of staff.

4. Creating Family Friendly Charters

One of the unique strengths of the Casey Foundation's initiative is its focus on the family. Since charter schools are schools of choice, families from the outset are very active in their children's charter schools. However, a disconnection often follows once the school is up and running. Communication may be lacking and reporting mechanisms are often spotty.

Built on examples from charter schools around the country, this product should provide ideas to charter developers on:

- how to conduct initial market research to inform the initial development of charter schools.
- how to maintain effective communication with parents and the meaningful involvement of families in the school over time, including reporting to them about the progress their students are making in school.
- how to develop and use parent satisfaction surveys and other means to improve the school's responsiveness to parents and students over time.

Selection Process

We are seeking individual or organizational contractors with demonstrated knowledge of and experience with the topic selected. The final design, budget, and timeline of each product will be developed through negotiations between the contractor and the Charter Friends National Network.

For consideration, please submit the following items by Friday, October 29:

- a brief (no more than 2-3 page) letter providing the information listed below
- your resume or other information on your background or qualifications to work in this area

Please transmit your information to Michelle McNiff through one of the following routes:

Mail: 602 Wimbeldon Drive, Raleigh, NC 27609

Email: mmm@ipass.net

Fax: (419) 828-9355

Call Michelle McNiff at (919) 786-9783 or email her at mmm@ipass.net if you have questions.

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Information to Include in a 2-3 Page Statement of Interest

Please supply the following information:

- Name of Individual Applying
- Name of Organization
- Address
- Telephone
- Fax
- E-mail

Please indicate the product(s) you are interested in developing:

- Creating Effective Charter School Boards
- Guide to Personnel Policies & Practices
- Making the Most of Human Resources
- Creating Family Friendly Charters

Other information to include in a 2-3 page letter indicating your interest:

- Please tell us about yourself, describing your experience and qualifications relevant to the product(s) you have indicated.
- Please describe any initial ideas you have about what kinds of tools (manuals? workshop series? videos?) would be most helpful to charter schools in the area(s) you have chosen.
- Please describe the most important topics you think the selected product(s) should cover.



Frequently Asked Questions

What is the Casey Foundation's Neighborhood Transformation / Family Development initiative?

Neighborhood Transformation / Family Development is a long-term strategy to advance the premise that children do better when their families are strong, and that families do better when they live in supportive communities. We believe any serious effort to improve outcomes for children must support families in their child-rearing roles, and that families must have access to multiple forms of support in their own neighborhoods to do the best job of raising their children. This strategy involves working in specific sites to improve the prospects for families living in tough neighborhoods, as well as building public will, supporting system reforms, promoting policies, and strengthening and connecting organizations and disciplines that contribute to family success.

What problems does the Foundation hope to address through an approach that centers on helping families succeed in tough neighborhoods?

Despite the fact that conditions have improved for many children over the last decade, a significant number are in serious danger of being left behind. Our KIDS COUNT project has identified some 9.2 million children who live in families that have several risk factors—such as poverty, living in a single-parent home, living in a home headed by a high school dropout, living with parents who are not employed, receiving welfare benefits, and lacking health insurance. When these vulnerable families are clustered together in isolated neighborhoods, they predictably become disconnected from the opportunities, networks, and help parents and caregivers need to offer their children the best possible chance to succeed. Since our mission has always been to improve the futures of vulnerable children, this set of families—and the neighborhoods they live in—are of particular concern to us.

What do you mean by tough neighborhoods?

Many people refer to these neighborhoods as distressed or disadvantaged, but we prefer the characterization of a parent who described her neighborhood by stating

simply, "this is a tough place to raise children." Many of these neighborhoods historically have had ample strengths, assets, and potential, but through a gradual pattern of declining investments, segregation, and fraying social institutions, they've become isolated from the economic and social mainstream. The word "tough" connotes a challenge, but it also reflects the strengths and assets of families in these neighborhoods. Parents and caregivers often have the same aspirations as those in other communities for their children and display remarkable resilience in the face of overwhelming odds. But they don't have the same kinds of economic opportunities, networks of social contacts, and supportive services that families in more affluent communities enjoy. Many of the most resourceful families respond by either insulating themselves or moving out.

What is *Making Connections*?

Making Connections, the first major component of our Neighborhood Transformation / Family Development strategy, is an initiative we are launching in 22 cities to demonstrate how a broad cross section of constituencies can be mobilized to improve the odds for families in tough neighborhoods. A key goal of this effort is to generate a critical mass of people, activities, resources, and attention around improving neighborhood conditions for families. We believe parents and other caregivers have a better chance of success when they are connected to three broad kinds of support. These include opportunities to work, earn a decent living, and build assets; close ties to friends, neighbors, kin, faith communities, and civic groups; and accessible and responsive services close to home. These services range from basics like good schools, housing, child care, and health care to recreational, preventive, and crisis-response services that are culturally appropriate and community oriented. We believe that building momentum around these kinds of connections in 22 specific places will help us demonstrate that challenging neighborhoods can be transformed into family-supportive environments on a national scale.

What do you mean by family success?

Family success means having the opportunities, resources, and support to offer your children the fundamental building blocks for a good life without a superhuman effort. To accomplish this goal, families need to live in environments that are safe, secure, and responsive. They need to be able to make a good living, build assets, and live in good homes. They need family, friends, colleagues, and institutions that reinforce positive child-rearing values and messages. They need responsive schools and support services that recognize and respect their cultures and values. And they need to have a voice in decisions that affect their families and communities.

Why are families such a central focus of this work?

Family circumstance is simply too powerful a predictor of child outcomes to ignore. We don't believe it's possible to improve the outlook for significant numbers of children over the long haul without responding to the needs of families. Historically, many efforts to improve child outcomes have concentrated on specific interventions aimed at the child or on physically removing children from families and neighborhoods deemed unhealthy. This approach fails to recognize and support the strengths and resources families often possess in the face of overwhelming odds or to cultivate neighborhood conditions that foster these qualities. A number of foundations, organizations, and efforts at the state and local level have become increasingly focused on finding ways to strengthen families and nurture healthier communities, and we hope to play a catalytic role in this movement.

What is your basic strategy to promote family success in tough neighborhoods?

Our strategy is to engage residents, civic groups, political leaders, grassroots groups, public and private sector leadership, and the faith community in a broad-based movement to connect families in isolated neighborhoods to the opportunities, social bonds, and supports that will ultimately increase their children's chances of success. Rather than launching a series of new programs, we hope to help improve the

visibility and effectiveness of family-strengthening efforts already underway and build better linkages between them. We also want to help multiple players and sectors in the community understand how their interests can be advanced—and what they can contribute—by becoming part of a larger movement to strengthen families in the context of neighborhoods. If our ideas resonate locally, we hope to attract investments of time, human resources, and money from a broad cross section of people and groups.

What are the 22 cities, and how did you select them?

The 22 cities are Atlanta, Baltimore, Boston, Camden, Denver, Des Moines, Detroit, Hartford, Indianapolis, Louisville, Miami, Milwaukee, New Orleans, Oakland, Philadelphia, Providence, San Antonio, San Diego, Savannah, Seattle, St. Louis, and Washington.

We tried to identify places where a critical mass of people and organizations could be mobilized to improve conditions for families in tough neighborhoods. Because the focus of our work has always been improving the odds for the least advantaged children, the places where we've had the most significant investments tend to have the highest concentrations of families living in poverty. Starting primarily with a set of places where we already had relationships on which to build, we drew on our experience, network of contacts, and a variety of data sources to determine where we could make the most meaningful impact. We chose places where the policy climate, reinvestment potential, and track record of community problem solving offered good potential for success.

How do you define success for the initial stage of this work?

We have identified five markers of success that, as a group, would suggest we are moving in the right direction at the end of the first three years. We are hopeful that this set of markers will help show us whether there is enough local enthusiasm, ownership, support, commitment, and investment in this work to pay off in the long run.

The markers include:

- Evidence that a broad cross section of people embrace the notion that children do better when their families do better and families do better in supportive neighborhoods
- Visible support from community leadership and organizations
- Investment by key constituencies like the public and private sector, faith-based institutions, and service providers
- Expanded, better connected, and more focused activities to help connect families to economic opportunities, social networks, and responsive services
- Neighborhoods better equipped to collect and use data to set priorities and make decisions about the use of community resources

How are you going about the work in the 22 places you have identified?

Site teams made up of Casey staff members and consultants have been assigned to work with each of the 22 cities. The site team leader, usually a senior Foundation staff member with wide-ranging experience in community initiatives, is the pivotal person on the team and has considerable flexibility to be responsive to the local agenda in adopting strategies to move toward the desired outcomes. The site teams have three major roles: to help the sites understand the aims of *Making Connections* and the mission of the Foundation; to direct technical assistance, flexible dollars, and other resources toward helping sites meet the objectives outlined above; and to help the Foundation make sound decisions about ongoing investments and relationships with the sites.

Will you be selecting specific neighborhoods within the targeted cities?

Yes. Although the success of this work hinges on strong relationships with and support from city and state players, we don't feel we can demonstrate the viability of this



approach without working in specific neighborhoods. Much of the site teams' early work has centered around getting to know various communities and constituencies and gathering advice about which neighborhood or neighborhoods offer the greatest potential to demonstrate the power of a concerted family success strategy. Some of the factors we are weighing include level of need, assets and strengths, relevance to state and city politics, presence of a strong "anchor" institution, and the extent to which current investments and initiatives are competing or complementary.

What does the Foundation plan to bring to this work?

We hope to bring our ideas, know-how, networks, and resources to help key constituencies mobilize around a neighborhood-driven agenda to promote family success. We hope to help residents and other key players make the case to the larger community about the importance of this work. We hope to provide communities with information about proven models, promising practices, and practical tools. We hope to offer guidance and technical assistance from the best and most accomplished practitioners in the field. And we hope to increase the sites' ability to use data to drive decisions and guide policies that support strong families and neighborhoods. We are hopeful that all of these contributions will help sites build the kinds of skills, leadership, and relationships they need to improve the visibility and effectiveness of activities that connect families to many forms of opportunity and support.

How much money are you earmarking for this effort?

We are committed to devoting up to half of our total grant making—as much as half a billion dollars—to the work we have described, which involves our efforts in the target sites as well as our activities to build national momentum around this agenda.

In the *Making Connections* sites, we will be moving very deliberately to get to know key people, players, and efforts on the ground before seeding any activities, and initial seed grants will be modest in scale. After the initial three years, we expect to deepen our investments and engagement in sites where a broad cross section of

players embrace this family-focused, neighborhood-based philosophy and where we think we can continue to play a catalytic role.

Foundation resources are also being used to support technical assistance, communications, and evaluation work in the target sites and to help implement the broader Neighborhood Transformation / Family Development agenda. We recognize that no single demonstration effort in selected places can shift the fortunes of the nation's children absent a national commitment. To that end, we are devoting significant resources to activities such as building public will, supporting system reform, promoting policy initiatives, and strengthening and linking organizations and disciplines dedicated to family success.

What are some common misconceptions about your approach?

The most common mischaracterization is that we plan to divide \$500 million between the 22 cities over the next decade. As we have stated, our investments in the target sites initially will be modest and will deepen over time in sites where there is evidence of a good fit and mutual interest between our goals and the site's priorities and policy climate. Besides the work in specific cities, our long-term investment also will encompass a wide range of activities to promote family success on a much broader scale.

What is the grant application process for *Making Connections*?

There is no application process. The first stage of this effort is designed to allow time and space for us and the sites to get to know each other in an authentic way so together we can assess whether and how our goals mesh. Our site teams are spending a great deal of time getting to know a wide range of people, activities, and organizations whose work supports this agenda and to determine whether there is a mutual fit. We are concerned initially with learning more about work on the ground and where opportunities exist to enhance these activities or link them in ways that connect families to multiple sources of opportunity and help.



Will you be designating a lead organization?

No. Consistent with our aim of supporting a local movement around family strengthening, we hope to work with a wide variety of groups and activities over time. We expect to support different local organizations in different ways, depending on their expertise and interest. Some may be tapped to convene the many different players who must work together. Others may help in gathering and analyzing data and tracking progress, while others may serve as fiscal agents or provide technical assistance and leadership development. Our goal is to help support and link a diverse range of formal and informal efforts and players that promote family success at the neighborhood level.

What makes you believe your Neighborhood Transformation / Family Development strategy can be sustained over time?

We are hopeful that the combination of scale, scope, span of time, and design of this effort offers the potential for long-term results. We recognize that the isolation and disinvestment in these neighborhoods took years to reach this point and will take years to reverse through a combination of local and national attention. We are committed to supporting this work for at least a decade. We believe that linking with others who are willing to invest their time and resources and promoting approaches that connect families to many kinds of opportunity and support will mean greater staying power. We recognize that the success of this work hinges on engaging coalitions of residents, civic and grass-roots groups, faith-based institutions, non-profit organizations, and public and private sector leaders to pursue strategies that contribute to strong families and thriving neighborhoods. Our hope is that these movements will become self-sustaining and bring about shifts in policies, programs, and activities that connect families to the opportunities and support they need to improve the odds of success for their children. We also hope that the support we offer will help strengthen neighborhood leadership and encourage the emergence of a community voice that can advocate for and play an increasingly important role in decisions about resources for families. Pr