



2009 Opportunity Collaboration

Delegate Comments, Commentary & Commitments

Unedited and uncensored, Delegate feedback is presented in two sections: (1) Delegate Commentary & Commitments as reported following the 2009 Collaboration and (2) A mosaic of Closing, Candid Comments collected at the final wrap-up session.

Delegate Commentary & Commitments

"The Opportunity Collaboration was fantastic -- great conference, great people and I even got a few dips in the ocean. Was our time together well-spent? Yes, absolutely. Every minute of it.

Were my objectives met? Yes. I came with 5 specific objectives (in no order): 1. Meet prospective donors. 2. Explore specific partnership opportunities. 3. Get relevant ideas from seminars, especially regarding the subject of scale. 4. Stay on top of trends both in microfinance/microenterprise and donor appetites. 5. Have some time to reflect on major strategic issues for Trickle Up

I developed several promising donors leads, both individual and foundations, as well as an awesome idea for a board candidate. Also, some very promising conversations with on partnering. Good stuff on scale during seminars, especially Mulago Foundation and Reach Global. Also, during general conversations, some useful perspectives from people on how big one really needs to be. Unexpected gem: women's fundraising session.

I'm usually not one for deep introspection, fairy tale divining and soul baring So I entered the space of the Colloquium with some skepticism. But, to my surprise, I gained a lot of useful insight on the subject of values and even gained some participatory skills. (Hey, maybe I'll take up yoga).

So, even though I still need to sit down to write out my broader thoughts for myself, I am certain that I gained some powerful insights and information on the subject of scale, which is one of those WKYAAN (what keeps you awake at night?) subjects for me. And it's WKYAAN first cousin: how to allocate my time and talents most effectively."

Bill Abrams, President, Trickle Up (New York, NY)

"The Opportunity Collaboration aligned perfectly with the current stage of my career. Deeper conversations. It was important. That's the end game."

Joy Anderson, Executive Partner, Criterion Ventures
(Haddam, CT)

"I already signed up and paid while in Mexico for next year's Opportunity Collaboration. So I voted with my credit card already as to how much I valued the experience. The best thing was the quality of the attendees. For me, I got some really good results in terms of potential partnerships and friendships.

Conferences are like speed-dating. You have a very short period of time with each of a number of brand-new people who may or may not have something to offer, and with whom you may or may not have any chemistry, but every now and then you get lucky and hook up with a real jewel.

October's Opportunity Collaboration in Mexico, billed as a chance to find new ways and new partners in the struggle to overcome poverty, was loaded with gems. Prepared to be disappointed, I was instead energized and overwhelmed by the concentration of talent, accomplishment and innovation among the 270 attending delegates. There were people working in all niches of the development ecosystem, from media to fish farming, empowerment of girls and women to affordable health care, microcredit to education.

The conference had as its basic theme the new trend in development work known as social enterprise, which to be honest is an intellectual goulash with as many definitions as there are practitioners. The idea is that business can be a force for good in the world if it would focus on people and the environment instead of only profits, and by the same token NGOs and non-profits could be more effective if only they would act more like businesses, although I wonder if that is really such a good idea. As I tend to go around saying in speeches these days, "Like General Motors and AIG Insurance, East Meets West is a non-profit."

But none of that is really the main point of the trend, or what the Opportunity Collaboration revealed. What was eye-opening to me is the tremendous innovation in the field of development at the moment, with huge amounts of new talent and new money pouring in to thousands of creative attempts to figure out how to do things better, bigger, smarter and more efficiently.

The private economy works best at that virtuous moment when rapid innovation, new ideas, large amounts of fresh capital and hordes of talented people reach critical mass and start destroying the old models of doing business and replace them with something better – at least until someone beats them at their own game. We are at that stage with the internet (so long newspapers, your day is done), and maybe, just maybe, we are heading into something similar in the international development arena.

Of course, just like with dating – speed or otherwise – it may be true that on the second, third and subsequent dates you come to find out that what seemed so attractive in the beginning is less so after repeat exposure. Nonetheless, it is clear that this is a time of impressive innovation for international organizations seeking to end poverty."

John Anner, Chief Executive Officer, East Meets West Foundation (Da Nang, Vietnam & Oakland, CA)

"The big take away for me was that I had a remarkable realization of the power of my work. In the values session, we were asked to describe our work and my response was that I was a neutral facilitator, my primary role being to assist donors in achieving their philanthropic goals. As the days advanced, I was struck by the group's deep understanding of poverty and conviction to wrestle with its complexity. I remained in my role of neutrality and very aware of my absent point of view.

It became clear to me that I had removed myself from these conversations long ago. The Colloquium readings reminded me of my days in college when I was so engaged, fiery and passionate and surrounded with like-minded women and professors pushing me to wrestle with complex issues and demanding a point of view or, at the very least, a thoughtful line of questioning for the sake of gaining a deeper understanding of the issue at hand. I questioned whether or not something had died in me and how, 20 years later, I had become a neutral facilitator with no point of view. I have been so concerned with finding common ground, shared values, always striving to construct rather than deconstruct.

The short of it is that I left with a renewed sense of purpose and conviction to step into my power and make change happen. This is how I can most effectively move the needle in my current role. For me this conference was certainly about connections (since my return, already nine email exchanges with Delegates), but it was more importantly about having the courage to step into the power within my reach.

The Opportunity Collaboration was a remarkable and unforgettable gift for me personally and for my life's calling -- I am immensely grateful to you."

Anonymous Delegate

"First of all, it may be the most well-organized event I have ever attended. You are to be congratulated for pulling so many complex elements together in such beautiful form. I loved that it was different than the usual - so much more interesting.

I met so many people interested in my work and I in theirs, and I have lots of follow-up to do. I appreciated having e-mail intros ahead of time - as well as contact info for Delegates. I met a number of people prior to the event, and it was really valuable.

The only thing that I found difficult was the long hours: morning exercise, then breakfast prep for the day or meetings, then a packed day, then up late with evening stuff. I know these were optional, but I didn't want to miss anything.

Plus the food was so good I ate too much! Accommodations were excellent. The fact that there was no reason to leave was a big part of what made it work so well. Awesome!"

Carola M. Barton, Director, Global Expansion, Linked TV
(San Francisco, CA)

"I wanted to share with you the benefits I received from the Opportunity Collaboration.

First, I discovered things about myself and what I fervently care about, namely, insisting on efficiency and effectiveness in creating wealth in a poor community. So now I need help in identifying deserving entrepreneurs. Besides money, I'd be happy to advise and do board work.

Second, I'm focused on creating jobs by backing third world entrepreneurs or businesses run by expats in third world countries. Low cost, durable medical equipment for the third world, which can also be imported into the first world. Obviously, this is a profit-oriented approach that'll do everyone well.

Another takeaway is that, in addition to clarification and direction for me, the Opportunity Collaboration has provided me with an impetus to move forward. So thank you, thank you, thank you!"

Alan Bernstein, President, Usher Group
(Laguna Beach, CA)

"I don't even know where to begin to thank you for such an amazing experience over the past few days. I can honestly say that it was a life-changing experience on so many levels and that relationships started at Opportunity Collaboration will undoubtedly continue for many years to come. The morning Colloquium was thought-provoking and reminded me of some intensive, experiential workshops that I've taken in the past. The energy level during meals or on the patio after dinner, as we discussed areas of common interest were terrific."

Judy Cara, Director, Corporate Citizenship, Western
Union Foundation (Englewood, CO)

"A reflection on my time at the mother of all networking opportunities for small to mid-size social entrepreneurs:

For Western social entrepreneurs engaged in community-based anti-poverty efforts, the Opportunity Collaboration in Ixtapa, Mexico was arguably the place to be. The concentration of quality small to mid-size nonprofits, thought leaders, and funders committed to this approach was quite remarkable.

I'm back now, replete with new relationships and interesting thoughts. I'm also absolutely exhausted. I'm feeling not just the kind of physical tiredness from international travel and being away from home, but a certain spiritual tiredness. The roots of this kind of exhaustion can be summed up in a statement I made to some folks sitting next to me as we were about to start lunch: "I'm just so tired of trying to make myself seem interesting."

It is very rare for a social entrepreneur to succeed without being good at pitching. You have to be always ready to tell your story, and to do so seeming like you're doing it with the same energy you did when you first began your venture. Try recounting the first time you had this heartbreaking exposure to abject poverty in Latin America or met an AIDS victim in Africa – and now do it at least six times a day, ready to do it again the moment someone next to you at lunch says, "So, what do you do?"

For some of us at least, this kind of repetition can bring about a certain numbness, a hardening to what once was a very precious and sensitive wellspring of motivation. It feels to me like taking my six year old's hand made birthday card that she crafted just for me... and then xeroxing several thousand copies and mass mailing it out to complete strangers.

So what is a social entrepreneur to do? You can't stop pitching. And the more successful you get, the more you will have to do it – only now people that you'll have to work even harder to "make yourself seem interesting." This usually means injecting in words like "scale" and "economic sustainability" anywhere you can in the narrative.

So how does a social entrepreneur keep on pitching over and over without losing her soul?"

Curtis Chang, Chief Executive Officer, Consulting Within Reach (San Jose, CA)

"The more time we were there, the more influential the meetings became because people opened up. I had 55 substantial talks. A much deeper understanding of the complexities that come with wanting to do good in the world and the huge challenges that we all face. New friends, new energy and a stronger sense of purpose and desire to bring change. I had no idea the whole thing was going to be as rewarding as it was. Collaboration!!!"

Greg Demirjian, Chief Executive Officer, IGivingWorld.Com (Nassau, Bahamas)

"Opportunity Collaboration was a very profound experience for me. As a newcomer to the world of social enterprise, I learned a great deal from my experience there and met several people with whom I will collaborate or support. I was inspired to see so many intelligent individuals acting in creative ways to effect important change. While it generated very tangible results, the most important outcome for me was the understanding that there is no time to waste. It has helped me identify 3 personal projects that I am putting into action and connect with potential collaborators of those projects. I have already signed up for Opportunity Collaboration 2010!"

Diana de Castro, Social Philanthropy Advisor (New York, NY)

"Incredible networking, and not just superficial "pleased to meet you" networking. I truly can't remember any other professional event where I have that many meaningful, intense conversations with people of like mind and action. That translated into "the most" connections I've ever gathered in such a short period of time. These are at least two dozen folks who I'll continue to turn to for advice and support throughout my career because we connected over these 5 days, ran into each other on the beach or at the bar, or in the airport/plane back from the event. I had intense conversations with an Opportunity Collaboration seatmate from Ixtapa to Mexico City; and continued to have conversations with others from Mexico City to Chicago, and in the Chicago O'Hare taxi line!

Have had requests for consulting from people I met at the Conversations for Change -- I hope that I can help them with my contacts and expertise -- I had a discussion with a potential client today, and will send him a proposal tomorrow

Was invited to serve as an advisor/expert on evaluation for a new online networking source for foundations -- being interviewed tomorrow for their newsletter. This happened because of one of the lunch table topic discussions -- I would not have met him/reached out to him, but the lunch topics gathered folks together who may not have known that they shared a common interest.

Girls' network: A number of executive professional women who are in my area are planning to get together for regular get togethers to support each other/share lessons, etc. We would have never known each other before the Opportunity Collaboration. It's our counter to the Obama all-male basketball game."

Carol Erickson, President, Carol A. Erickson Associates
(Washington, DC)

"Word on the street is that the Opportunity Collaboration was an off-the-charts smash success. Not that there was ever any doubt....but I've been absolutely thrilled to hear the twitters & chatters as the sparks continue to fly. So hopefully I'll be able to join you all next time around."

Abigail Falik, Founder, Global Citizen Year (San
Francisco, CA)

"A very belated and huge CONGRATULATIONS on a fantastic Collaboration!! The buzz about it has been extraordinary -- and what's even more inspiring is the flurry of post-Collaboration emails, follow-ups, events, meetings, etc.... Clearly you have pushed a big ball to the top of a hill and it is rolling down the other side with substantial momentum. Thanks for all that you have done... You should be so proud!!"

Elizabeth Funk, Chair/Founder, Dignity Fund (San
Francisco, CA)

"I arrived at the Opportunity Collaboration with a concept paper for a potential new NGO, including the financial model, business plan, etc. and was in need of a comprehensive and critical peer review. I hosted a workshop on my topic, asked the participants for a completely candid critique and, over the course of the hour, my model had been deconstructed by the group and elements were criticized.

This was a humbling experience, but a very positive experience for several reasons:

1. the workshop affirmed that the problem I am seeking to address is indeed a significant problem without an existing solution and that my approach to the problem is generally sound;
2. the group determined that my model was too dependent on grant money and has far more growth potential if PRIs and, potentially, guarantees are incorporated;
3. I had been operating under several assumptions that were challenged, but which I have since upheld through research and about which I can now more knowledgeably speak;
4. after the workshop ~ 10 of the participants offered to advise me as I move forward with revisions and implementation;
5. having had such a qualified group review my work I am now more confident in the pieces that withstood the critique.

My model is now significantly better as a result and, most importantly, I have a peer network moving forward that I will tap for guidance and, potentially, partnership in the future. In the process of learning about other organizations I was forced to reconsider the role of my own organization in the broader movement. I think this introspection is important to ensure that organizational goals are always viewed in the context of broader societal goals.

The geographic isolation — confined on a resort without cell phones -- forced attendees to focus on each other rather than the outside world. The uniqueness of the experience (amazing location, first of its kind, star-studded cast, etc.) — individuals sharing a unique experience build personal bonds. Though 5 days seems like a long time, I don't think it should have been any shorter. The marginal benefit of each day increased over the course of the conference as people moved past elevator pitches and cordial, superficial social interactions and really had to expose their ideas and themselves."

Daniel Geballe, Program Associate, Corporation for Enterprise Development (San Francisco, CA)

"I just want to express my great appreciation for giving me the opportunity to participate in the Opportunity Collaboration. It was a fabulous un-conference in a fantastic setting. I learned a lot and made many friends. The most enjoyable part was the Colloquium for the Common Good. I would love to see that this event continues and grows."

Thomas George, President, Vipani (Maragua, Kenya)

"First, CONGRATULATIONS on putting on a truly outstanding event. You had an amazing group of people at the Opportunity Collaboration that all had a lot to offer.

I thought it was brilliant to have all the participants also be the presenters. While the workshop quality varied, there were many excellent ones that engaged us in great discussion. The location was fabulous! I loved having the whole place -- so you knew that everyone you met was there for the same purpose. Food and rooms were outstanding.

I'm just starting to follow up, but I wrote up notes from 35 one-one-one conversations that are relevant for my personal interests and for Village Enterprise Fund (VEF) where I serve on the board. The conversations included possible funders for VEF, possible collaborations in Africa, ideas for publishing articles, a group that wants to visit VEF in Africa, several people to network with to help further VEF's work, and a half-dozen people I plan to meet with and learn more about what they are doing.

In addition I made some new friends and I learned about new efforts I might want to get involved in.

Again, way to go!!"

Debbie Hall, Chair, Board of Directors, Village Enterprise Fund (San Carlos, CA)

"I met a whole bunch of really amazing people. Getting to sit down with folks who are doing such extraordinary work is absolutely worth the price of the ticket. I met people I feel confident I will know and work with for the rest of my work. Specifically, I was able to get clear about my ambition to put together a collaboration of non-profits working in southern Africa and, even more important than that, I got clear about the future of our project in Zambia. Two HUGE accomplishments."

Cheri Huber, Founder, Living Compassion (Kantolomba, Zambia)

"A real tour de force with purpose, panache and orchestration.... It was a rousing success.... I was proud and honored to be a participant."

Gerald B. Hildebrand, Executive Director, Global Center for Social Entrepreneurship, University of the Pacific (Stockton, CA)

"First and foremost, thank you for a magnificent job, a great networking opportunity, an enlightening set of sessions (and a GREAT room!!!). One colossal thanks for this unique opportunity!

As for what is coming out of the Opportunity Collaboration for Shared Interest, it is too early to tell, but I can list a couple of promising directions: (a) A possible paper on guarantee funds, authored by a participant at the conference and covering at least the 3 guarantee funds there; (b) A discussion of possible programmatic collaboration between our organization and one of the foundations doing HIV/AIDS work in South Africa; (c) Gathering information about San Francisco's community banking initiatives and sharing them with South African government leaders looking for programs that work! (d) A possible foundation investment or two for Shared Interest; (e) At least two possible delegates for Shared Interest's next delegation to South Africa; (e) An ongoing discussion of how to introduce the topic of socially responsible investing to Women Donors Network."

Donna Katzin, Chief Executive Officer, Shared Interest
(South Africa & New York, NY)

"...a flawlessly executed, transformative experience for hundreds of people. The Colloquium for the Common Good experience was the highlight of my Opportunity Collaboration time because we formed a tight community in a short amount of time that both challenged and brought out the best of everyone to live their values."

Marina Kim, Director, University Programs, Ashoka
(Washington, DC)

"Overall I was quite pleased with the meeting. I made some great contacts and also did a great deal of learning.

I really liked and learned a great deal about some of the private sector models that are working to improve the supply chain for a variety of health care and development related goods and services in the developing world. I plan to follow up with both the franchise models and credit with education models to see how we might use those existing distribution networks for nutrition goods and services (including behavior change related to healthy eating and proper feeding during early life and pregnancy and lactation.) This could be quite "game changing" for the work I am doing."

A great success on the productive thinking side was time with some true innovators, which I very much enjoyed. I was particularly interested in organizations with strong business models and/or interesting innovations that had the potential to move the development field further.

Probably the biggest accomplishment was having the time to think and learn and meet some very proactive and innovative people. You started the meeting by saying that all of the people there were "doers". I found that to be spot on and I very much appreciated the level of creativity and innovation I saw."

Katharine Kreis, Senior Program Officer for Nutrition, Bill
& Melinda Gates Foundation (Seattle, WA)

"The conference far exceeded my high expectations. In addition to providing a forum that encouraged the sharing of the successes and challenges we all face in our work, it also offered the opportunity for less formal interactions, which is what I think puts Opportunity Collaboration in a league of its own - relationship-building the cornerstone of collaboration. In fact, I'm already collaborating with several attendees by linking the Inhangane Project with resources at the Ross School of Business at the University of Michigan, and working with potential partners for Hippo Water International in India."

Cynthia Koenig, President/Founder, Hippo Roller
International; Research Associate, William Davidson

Institute; Erb Institute for Global Sustainable Enterprise,
University of Michigan (Ann Arbor, MI)

"We all do a lot of ritual traveling. The Opportunity Collaboration is entirely different."

Peter Laugharn, Executive Director, Firelight Foundation
(Santa Cruz, CA)

"The Opportunity Collaboration delivered all it promised. Delegates could not help but learn, grow, be inspired, and bump into people and ideas they wanted to collaborate around. Bravo to you and the staff!!!! The non-conference conference worked!!!!

Came away with some potential collaborative projects. Currently following up with two. Made great connections and contacts. Had more meaningful conversations than usually happens at conferences. The hallway talks happened over meals, after meals or in the ocean. I LOVED the flat structure, everyone an expert.

The Opportunity Collaboration was one of the best conferences I have attended. That said, I am inclined to have it be something I attend every other year. I feel like I have been well-fed."

Bonny Meyer, Principal, Meyer Family Enterprises
(Oakville, CA)

"Deep appreciation for pulling together the Opportunity Collaboration which I wanted to support, and enjoyed immensely. I came away with new opportunities to collaborate and some great new friendships as well.

My take, having been to a gazillion, is that there is always a key element that exists, or not, and that is whether people actually connect or not. The Opportunity Collaboration had the 'special sauce' of bringing a special group of people together who were open to each other, and wanting to connect. The result was a rich mixture."

Brad Michaels, Founder & Director, SocialLab.net (San
Francisco, CA)

"I walked away with four new project involvements and some potential investments. So much came out of it for us and we are extremely appreciative:

(a) Specifically, I love what FeelGood is doing and will be of whatever assistance I can be to them. This is a transformational approach for the species that is far more wise because they assist college students to keep their power and use it to discover the oneness of nature in their experiences rather than to give their power away to anything.

(b) Community Action New Mexico is working with the Aspen Institute to create a trust fund for every child in New Mexico. I will be assisting the New Mexico model that will, hopefully, be supported by legislative action that is already well along in the process.

(c) The most fun one was testing my idea of having an ice cream flavor at Ben & Jerry's (I am on the board) named Elder Berry to honor the Elders Group of Nobel Laureates. I hope all give it the ok and it happens before the next Opportunity Collaboration.

(d) Ten people came to my lunch on the topic of creating a Common Good Business Community.... All were enthusiastic after our conversations and committed to seeing if it makes sense to go further with it.

(e) We just finished our Private Placement Investment Committee phone call with Calvert Social Funds and approved doing further study on investing in EveryOne Counts which we learned about at the Opportunity Collaboration.”

Terry Mollner, Chair, Stakeholders Capital, Inc.
(Shutesbury, MA)

“Thank you so much for organizing such a great event. It was good to be able to connect with such a variety of people and really useful to discuss investment in Bangladesh in a wider context. The morning Colloquium for the Common Good was probably the most useful to me and was a great way to get to know 'whole' people rather than just isolated parts of them visible through their work. A number of people from my morning group requested business plans. Thanks again for organizing such an incredible event.”

Samantha Morshed, Chief Executive Officer, Hathay
Bunano (Dhaka, Bangladesh)

“First of all, a big THANK YOU! I have organized a few conferences and attended many. The Opportunity Collaboration was the best ever... The best moment was sitting at a lunch table, being bombarded by 3 Delegates about how accepting grants is a strength and not weakness. It was intense... I was overwhelmed. But, thanks to the three of them, it changed my whole thinking!”

Darshan P. Mundada, Rotary World Peace Fellow,
Duke-UNC Rotary Peace Center (Raleigh, North
Carolina)

“The folks who I spoke with said that they were energized by the Opportunity Collaboration and had a great time. Trust me, that’s not something that I hear often from a conference.

In general, I think that the flexible format and expectation of collaboration and openness were great. These elements made it easy for folks to engage with one another. Similarly, the conversations were a hit. It was a feat to keep them casual enough to drive conversation, and I think that goal was achieved. Congratulations!

I generally heard folks saying that the participant quality was very good. The conference design also allowed and encouraged a high degree of interaction, from the networking lunches to the conversations for change to the Colloquium for the Common Good. One person said that the same people that seem very inaccessible at the Skoll World Forum were completely accessible at the Opportunity Collaboration – which I think is a great thing.

Yahoo on the venue! Hassle-free. It was lovely to not have to lift a finger while thinking about how to create social change.

All in all, it was honestly a wonderful conference for me. I am not a conference lover at all. And I was actually happy at the end of the Opportunity Collaboration! Maybe not for the reasons expected, but happy nevertheless.”

Hope Neighbor, Founding Partner, Hope Consulting
(San Francisco, CA)

“ShoreBank is working on a matrix to catalogue the results of the Opportunity Collaboration for us. The sheer size will show how many potential links were made, renewed or deepened at Opportunity Collaboration. As I'd anticipated, one of the best parts for me was spending time with people I already knew, but seldom get to reflect with. Wayne Silby of Calvert, for one, and there are others.

And I loved morning yoga at 6:30am (this was truly wonderful). And the day visiting locally with businesses that have significant economic development potential if they can secure investors was one of the real highlights for me, and essential to bring some reality into the surreal luxury of the setting. It was fabulous to hear the questions and ideas with which people like Willy Foote of Root Capital peppered the organic producers and salt harvesters; on-the-spot technical assistance!"

Jan Piercy, Executive Vice President, ShoreBank
(Chicago, IL)

"The networking was great and that was what it was for."

Drummond Pike, President, Tides Foundation (San
Francisco. CA)

"This was one of the best conferences I have been too, ever. The highlight for me was the amount of time we had to meet other Delegates and have in-depth discussions. It was very fluid; two people in discussion became four and six, etc. That is where the real collaboration took place.

I along with others in my Colloquium group began to realize that the reactions to the readings hung our values out there and each of us was unusually tolerant of each other's differences. I got from the experience the following: In order to really collaborate with others, you must be a good listener, tolerant of others ideas, have good and similar values, be willing to take a different road other than your own to accomplish similar goals and share power, even abrogate power to those who you ultimately are trying to serve. And lastly trust. I got to trust those in my group, which in my opinion, is paramount to human interaction.

I have been to hundreds of conferences and, quite frankly, sometimes I feel totally out of it. Many conferences are time for colleagues to get together and renew old acquaintances and blow smoke up each other's tail feathers. Here, there was barely a moment that I was not engaged with others either one-on-one or in small groups. People seemed to have a ferocious desire to learn from others and share their ideas. It was stimulating beyond belief. Small gatherings were everywhere, whether on the beach, at the bar, in the ocean, pool or around meal tables. Overall, A+."

Chip Raymond, Partner, Hudson Heights Consulting;
Former CEO, Citigroup Foundation (New York, NY)

"First in the interest of transparency, I will admit that the rumors are true. This great event to end poverty was held at a Club Med. They kept that well hidden until we were outside the airport getting on the bus. I wondered if it was a joke when I saw a Club Med logo on the room key they gave us before we got on the bus, but sure enough. It wasn't really my style and rather ironic given the focus of the gathering may have dissuaded me from going had I known what the Leadership Village really was.

On the other hand, I see the logic behind it. It was a place where 250 people from different backgrounds could all be in one "community" and just focus on the conversations at hand. There were no other guests. We had total use of all the buildings, rooms etc. Everyone who ate, had a drink or did yoga with you was a Delegate. And we didn't have to think about where we would eat, how we would get there, what we would eat, how we would pay, how much to tip, etc. We could save our brain energy entirely for the topic at hand.

The whole event was really designed to facilitate deep conversations and was not conducive to making pitches. The connection of most immediate importance to come out of this event was probably with Michael Roy, Founder and Chief Scientist at CREA (Conservation through Research, Education and Action). Michael founded CREA a few years ago after working in Panama as a conservation biologist with the Smithsonian Tropical Research Institute, because he saw the need to make conservation beneficial to campesinos if the eco-systems he had been studying were going to be saved.

In a nutshell, we are looking at combining our efforts in Panama to bring SHI's rural development focus to CREA's work, while bringing CREA's scientific research and study focus to SHI's work. We may also look at sharing office space with CREA in Panama City. If all goes well, we may look at completely merging the two organizations down the road and replicating the Panama model in SHI's other country programs.

As exciting as the new connections from the Opportunity Collaboration are, I think some of the new ideas are equally so. I think the idea that really clicked for me at the Opportunity Collaboration was the idea of earned-income ventures to support our affiliates and us, probably connected to marketing products for participants and graduates. I see this as a (maybe the only) way to make our work more self sustaining down the road and to facilitate scaling up to the global level.

The other idea that I think I am finally ready to embrace, thanks to a conversation with Bob Graham of Namaste Direct, is to think about charging our program participants a fee that is reasonable, but significant to them for our technical assistance. The goal would be to help our affiliates a little with income and, more importantly, help to ensure that program participants value the service we provide, take full advantage of it and let us know if they don't feel they are getting good value for their money, thus, letting us know when we need to change something."

Florence Reed, President & Founder, Sustainable Harvest International (Surry, ME)

"First of all, thank you for providing an amazing experience. It will take me days to begin processing the things that I learned and the wonderful people I met. What an amazing experience!

You asked me to let you know if there was one important thing that I got out of the Opportunity Collaboration. I can't do that. There were at least a dozen amazing, impactful, conversations and the professional connections far outweighed any expectations I may have had. For years I have collected newspaper and magazine articles on my heroes in the world of global social ventures and microfinance...to meet and be embraced by so many of them is beyond words.

There was another side effect of the Opportunity Collaboration that was completely unexpected. We bonded into a group of people who care about each other and do not want to lose touch. What the Opportunity Collaboration set in motion will continue with meetings, dinners, and informal coffee house gatherings into the future."

Rose Riskind, Founder/Chairman, BidnKind (San Leandro, CA)

"Wanted to let you and your team know that you all did a fabulous job putting together, and pulling off, the Opportunity Collaboration in Ixtapa. It was almost overwhelming for me, being surrounded by so much brainpower in one place! The talent pool in this broad field is deep, and diverse. That there were so many young people there really provided a lot of energy.

I got excellent feedback on my small business development idea, recharged my batteries on why I do what I do, and gained new inspiration for being more effective in my own social business and philanthropic pursuits. I really came not knowing what to expect, with an open mind, and was really pleased with the result."

Doug Spencer, President, Spencer Associates (Denver, CO)

"Opportunity Collaboration was better than I'd ever imagined – on so many levels. One major part, of course, is the strong interest we got from so many prospective investors."

Lori J. Steele, Chief Executive Officer, Everyone Counts, Inc. (San Diego, CA)

"I wanted to provide some real quick feedback because I so much value what you are doing with Opportunity Collaboration. First, it was a great experience for me. I liked the "retreat" feel I got from the morning Colloquium sessions with my group. I liked the Colloquium because it is not what you see at a typical conference. Also, I like the fact that I was not feeling I needed to network while I was there. Of course many conversations turned into ideas for how we could work with others. Also, had good connections with people who might eventually support our work."

Gary White, Executive Director & Co-Founder,
Water.Org (Kansas City, MO)

"One of the more risky features of the Opportunity Collaboration has been the daily, two hour group rap sessions they call the Colloquium for Good. The logic of the sessions is that they provide a time for people to think big, break out of the specifics of their particular field, and connect in a more deep and ongoing fashion. Although not without critique, the success of the conversations add one more reason to kill the plenary session for good.

I think it's important to write about it for the reason that it's not the type of structure found at most network conferences - nonprofit or for profit - because it takes people out of what they know and puts them in the uncomfortable position of being vulnerable and reflective. Most of the people here share a bias towards action, which makes the relatively high level of participation in the Colloquium all the more impressive.

There were, of course, a number of complaints. Some people didn't like the selection of the readings (which I'd agree with), some people had a hard time feeling like the conversations were too unstructured, or too theoretical. Some people just wanted to use the time to grow deeper relationships with the other members of their group. The remarkable thing is, though, that most of this critique was delivered in the context of how to improve the discussion sections, rather than why they should be scrapped.

I think at this point that most conferences have grown lazy and boring on the fat of the plenary session. Plenary sessions (also known as "panel discussions") usually have 3-5 experts with a moderator discussing some theme or topic. Inevitably, by the time people have introduced themselves and gotten through a first round of commentary on whatever topic is at hand, it starts to wrap up and every one leaves no more enlightened than before.

I understand why they exist. It seems like a great idea to have a bunch of smart people discussing a single topic. The problem is that the constraints of the structure almost always end up scrunching any real conversation. I often joke that I've never met a plenary that I didn't hate, and while "hate" is a strong word, I only use it because I can't think of anything stronger.

I'm thrilled that the Opportunity Collaboration tried something different, and I'm especially excited that, by and large, it worked."

Nathaniel Whittemore, Founder, Assetmap Strategies
(San Francisco, CA)

"The Opportunity Collaboration was absolutely terrific! Masterfully planned.

The Colloquium for the Common Good was extremely stimulating and led me to think about new things and rethink old ones. I loved the people I met. Many, many connections were made by the leaders of Oswald Foundation grantees -- and we encountered several interesting investment options.

Everyone you enlisted to help was great. The resort people were wonderful. The food was incredible. The weather was hot! I loved the entire experience and I think it was a truly remarkable happening for all. We definitely need to do it again."

Susan Cornell Wilkes, Director, Oswald Family
Foundation (Minnesota, MN)

"Word on the Opportunity Collaboration experience has really gotten around. Whenever I mention that I attended, people say 'You were THERE!!' I just wanted to tell you that what the Opportunity Collaboration engendered was really magnificent. Thank you so much for making this experience possible."

Claudia Viek, Chief Executive Officer, California
Association for MicroEnterprise Organizations (San
Francisco, CA)

"Thank you very much for inviting me to the Opportunity Collaborative. It was so well organized and very different from other conferences that I have gone to.

The concept of the Colloquium for the Common Good I thought was excellent. We could get to know each other in the group and the ideas that were explored were excellent, particularly those about values. The workshops were also thoughtfully organized so that there were a lot of choices and, in general, I thought that what was presented was good in the workshops I went to.

But above all, the environment made such a difference as well as the amount of free time to talk to many different people about each of our programs. The diversity of people was excellent.

I want to congratulate you on a really successful event."

Sakena Yacoobi, Chief Executive Officer, Afghan
Institute of Learning (Kabul, Afghanistan)

Closing, Candid Comments

"I came to explore...was planning to start something...now will join with existing organization."

"Confirmed my interest in West Africa."

"May not be broad enough in my thinking and investments."

"Colloquium discussions complex."

"Access to people easy."

"Leap of faith to come. Now very glad I did."

"Schedule not as packed as I thought. Continually stimulating."

"Social investment opportunities more complex."

"More confident that I can partner."

"Openness...idea sharing...relationships."

"Got tired of hearing myself talk."

"Genuine interest in others and other missions."

"Got to know people personally beyond transactions."

"Easier to explain what I do and who I am."

"Exposure to different points of view."

"Colloquium challenged me."

"Action ideas for me."

"Map of leadership village was complicated."

"Philanthropy versus market solutions is tricky."

"Serendipity versus structured meetings."

"Policy reform needed."

"Getting how the system works in the developing world."

"We/they – are we hearing from the right people? Are they even here?"

"Lunch topical tables worked."

"Intergenerational respect."

“Exposure to best practices.”
“Colloquium means I will bring relationships home.”
“Location demanded commitment.”
“People’s openness.”
“Left egos at home.”
“So much physical and mental space.”
“No hierarchy.”
“Sure I need to do more work with poor farmers.”
“Need for deeper relationships & conversations with other leaders.”
“Weather is really hot.”
“Use case studies & real time challenges as basis for workshops.”
“Build toward more immediate action.”
“Expensive to use cell phones.”
“All-inclusive fee liberating.”
“Care-free location distant from home office.”
“Need quick ‘speed-dating’ sessions.”
“Long lunch/dinner meal times excellent.”
“Everyone on equal footing.”
“Deep relationships...real conversations.”
“Time commitment needed for systemic change.”
“Barrier: lack of clients/grantees/populations served.”
“Create language for how to build relationships across class lines.”
“No powerpoint led to conversations.”
“Everyone a participant and presenter.”
“Need more direction/guidance on how to lead workshops.”
“Put photos on delegate roster.”
“Use name tags to state organizational need or mission.”
“Cross sectoral collaboration working.”
“Opportunity Collaboration as facilitator of relationships. Don’t tackle the system.”
“Connect with others, like SoCap and Global Philanthropy Forum.”
“Tell stories of our new collaborations!”
“Shared definition of what we are working on.”
“Need to work more holistically.”
“Would love to end with commitment session.”
“Decided collaboration in-country necessary.”
“Became surer that power must move from foundations to poor.”
“Became clearer that my new idea will work.”
“Learned ease of taking social change tool from philanthropy to social investment without mission loss.”
“Looser Opportunity Collaboration structure allowed frank exchanges about challenges & failures.”
“Opened up new ways to work together.”
“Given the opportunity, people move from individual separation to a together.”
“New connections spawned new ideas.”
“Rules of the game changed the dynamic from transactional to relationship.”
“Format conducive to deep connections.”
“Liked organization-anonymous name tags.”
“Faith and secular together!”
“Easy access to everyone.”
“Environment made it safe to open up to others.”
“Shared my passion and interests.”
“Lots of different perspectives and backgrounds.”
“Real life version of Social Edge.”
“Insight from random encounters.”
“Evaluation is critical. Would like to do evaluation in my own organization.”
“Must follow-up contacts with action.”
“Three collaborations pending.”
“Learned from ‘sticky’ examples.”

“Colloquium sessions meant more thoughtful leadership possible.”
“Funding possibilities!”
“More discussions like this & more reflection required.”
“Go bigger or go home. Go systemic or don’t bother.”
“Realized there are more indigenous solutions.”
“Microfinance doesn’t mean poverty elimination. It is just a tool.”
“Market-based approach is one way, not only way.”
“Importance of macro-level policy change versus grassroots.”
“Expanded mind!!”
“Faith-based preconceptions blown.”
“Profound need for reassessment of movement & us as movers.”
“Rearranging chairs on the Titanic?”
“Collaboration is based on relationships, not transactional exchanges.”
“Business foundations are based on passion & relationships.”
“Change can happen.”
“Opportunity for collaboration exists & can be successful.”
“Good vibe of openness to new ideas, projects & people.”
“Gained broader frameworks.”
“Exchange of ideas via Colloquium.”
“Importance of organizing the local community.”
“Thinking how the community can have ownership for change.”
“Importance of holistic approach & leadership versus ‘point’ solutions.”
“Identify obstacles to collaboration, investigate each in depth and then work together to solve.”
“Necessary networks formed.”
“Found mentors and supporters at Opportunity Collaboration.”
“Met leaders face-to-face in safe place.”
“Overwhelming intensity -- want to carry it forward.”
“Open sourcing of ideas.”
“Domestic microfinance recognized & valued.”
“Learned why we must focus more on advocacy.”
“Keep balance of planned and unplanned connections.”
“Ripple effect of connections.”
“Free flowing conversations.”
“Difficult to truly gauge progress/success.”
“Encouraged to be ourselves, rather than our entities.”
“Able to live and learn from others.”
“Getting good people together with overlapping values.”
“Liked just names on tags, instead of organizations. Encouraged peer-to-peer engagement.”
“Liked value of serendipity with full resort just for our group.”
“Hard to get into self-critical zone.”
“Valuable ideas shared.”
“Add more time between breakouts.”
“How to scale = good focus to add.”
“Length of conference helped create opportunity/collaboration.”
“Colloquium = anchor network/group, like a homeroom at school.”
“Rich diversity of international and national was productive.”
“LOVED flexible time schedule.”
“Values-based conversation to start the day led to more fresh-thinking & not ‘how?’, but why?”
“Right-sized event, but still did not meet everyone.”
“Should have more government representation.”
“Loved no powerpoint.”
“I was shown that hierarchies can be broken down & people can interact across power dynamics.”
“The setting, the format and the dress code all helped level the playing field.”
“Intentionality of collaboration.”
“Value in every conversation.”
“Welcoming.”

"Got work done!"
"Magic of 'right' conference."
"Collaboration can cut down on re-inventing the wheel."
"Importance of advocacy & public policy to effecting change."
"Network by offering more to new friends!"
"Keep Opportunity Collaboration rolling."
"I deepened my knowledge."
"See importance of helping people gain meaning from their wealth."
"Compression of time helps us move forward and achieve breakthroughs."
"Interconnectness is ubiquitous."
"No ranking of issues."
"This is a gathering where I belonged."
"We are running out of time."
"I am more sure of my life choices."
"Colloquium illuminated 'whole person', not just organizational leader role."
"This is opening doors."
"Honesty promoted."
"What are the questions we are grappling with?"
"Microfinance perhaps not as impactful as I thought."
"This conference maybe more helpful than I thought initially."
"I am more sure poverty will not be alleviated in my generation."
"I am in the right field!"
"Democracy among Delegates, a peer environment."
"Width, breadth, depth of talent/expertise."
"Overwhelming."
"Too many organizations spend a lot of energy inventing the same systems."
"Open, common, central spaces caused dialogue."
"Longer conference worked."
"Easy to get to know and talk with people, partnerships."
"Colloquium readings of fiction supported community building."
"Casual clothing and setting promoted peer engagement."
"Connecting, nurturing emotional need for mutual support."
"Change field by on-going cross-fertilization of ideas."
"Boldness to think we can change the system."
"Public/private partnerships are needed."
"Power and smarts of business world is welcomed by NGOs."
"Hard to invest in social enterprises."
"Great focus on networking. Very sharp people."
"Connecting faith-based groups and foundations."
"Building conversations due to adequate space, time and facilitation."
"Easy to gain 10 pounds. Dieting was hard."
"Space and time to build relationships."
"Going on the trapeze!"
"Changed my mind about conferences."
"Changed my mind about my narrow focus."
"I connected with those that I thought ahead of time I wouldn't be able to."
"Much can be accomplished through social enterprise."
"Opportunity to be myself instead of just representative of my institution was great."
"Open, honest conversations."
"Human connection as powerful as economic connection."
"Asked a deeper question: why my organization exists?"
"Need in-country cooperation and structured follow-up."
"Preconference connections were mixed."
"Colloquium good for relationship building."
"Good that we took over the village. Everywhere was someone to have a meaningful conversation with."
"Testing our theories of change across the specialties of water, health education, etc."

“Quality time.”
“Colloquium let us step back and assess.”
“Listening to other’s questions.”
“Refreshing mix of entry points.”
“Colloquium exposed me to ‘unlike’ collaborations and made us think beyond our own worlds.”
“Space for meeting, for relaxing, for discussions.”
“Name tags without institutions worked.”
“Diversity was good, but could be better.”
“Defined more clearly what we are working towards.”
“Need to address systems issues more aggressively.”
“Un-made my mind. Reconsidered first instincts.”
“I can make a difference.”
“Convinced I can dig deeper into why we are here.”
“I’ve never been to a conference that has allowed for this level of collaboration and ability to move freely in and out of conversations.”
“Lots of inspiration”
“Young people have valuable things to say.”
“Invaluable opportunity to hear others points of views and perspectives and then engage in conversation and perhaps respectfully go toe to toe.”
“It’s getting better by the day”
“It seems everyone here gets to give a workshop.”
“It’s too hot and I prefer a location with a cooler climate.”
“There is an amazing growing collaboration between people.”
“The Conversations for Change needed to incorporate more dialogue... most were a monologue.”
“This has been a wonderful opportunity to meet people.”
“I am leaving with three contacts/partners to move my work forward—what a success.”
“Great things will happen from this conference.”