

**Neighborhood Networks Quarterly Consortia Conference Call
Basics in Neighborhood Networks Consortia Board Development
September 12, 2006**

Conference Call Summary

On September 12, 2006, Neighborhood Networks held a quarterly consortia conference call, entitled “Basics in Neighborhood Networks Consortia Board Development.” This call focused on topics including the roles and responsibilities of board officers and members, strategies for recruiting community members who are unaffiliated with Neighborhood Networks to a consortium board, and tips for empowering board members to increase the visibility of Neighborhood Networks Consortia. The Neighborhood Networks Consortia Development technical assistance staff and guest speakers reviewed best practices for nonprofit board development, as well as strategies for leveraging board relationships to attract resources and partnerships.

Two guest speakers were featured: Miles Graham, board treasurer of the Neighborhood Networks National Consortium and board president of Community Builders of Arkansas, Inc. (CBA), the Arkansas Neighborhood Networks consortium; and Madelyne Pfeiffer, board vice president of the California Neighborhood Networks Consortium (CNNC), based in southern California. The guest speakers discussed their experiences with developing the boards of their respective consortia, and provided valuable information for Neighborhood Networks consortia in the midst of the board development process.

Highlights from the Call:

- The speakers provided an overview of the board recruitment process, which begins with an assessment of the skills, qualities, and expertise the board needs to operate more effectively. Once a board has identified its needs, the nominating committee (comprised of several current board members) develops selection criteria. The speakers explained that the nominating committee is responsible for clearly and honestly communicating the board’s expectations to prospective board members, as well as the benefits of participating in a Neighborhood Networks consortium board. Pfeiffer stressed the importance of this step, and added that her local consortium board was able to form a productive, efficient board only after implementing specific criteria in the board recruitment process.
- According to the speakers, prospective board members will want meaningful, clear, and concise information about the organization—including its mission, goals, and activities—before agreeing to serve on the board. It is also important for boards to spend time cultivating prospective board members, allowing them to become gradually involved in the organization through other activities before taking on the role of board member. Board recruitment is never a wasted effort, because even in cases when prospective board members decide not to join the board, the recruitment process serves to increase awareness of the organization.
- The speakers emphasized that prospective board members should demonstrate a strong commitment to the Neighborhood Networks Initiative and the mission of the consortium, a willingness to commit their time and energy, and the ability to network with other organizations on behalf of the consortium. In addition to these qualities, the speakers also

discussed the skills and qualities Neighborhood Networks consortia should look for when recruiting board members. The speakers explained that it is essential to consider recruiting board members with experience serving on nonprofit boards, as well as expertise in one or more of the following areas: finance, legal matters, fundraising, organizational planning, and public relations.

Graham stated that CBA had recently invited a local city attorney to serve on its board. The attorney accepted the position and in his first several weeks as a board member, has already brought a new perspective on how to organize the consortium, as well as resources from local government.

- Graham highlighted the various responsibilities of board officers, who comprise the executive committee of a board. He stated that they must make a significant time commitment to ensure that a board functions properly. Pfeiffer explained that the CNNC board meets monthly, either in person or via conference call (depending on the officers' availability), and the regular contact ensures that the consortium makes progress each month toward accomplishing the goals set forth in its strategic plan.
- Finally, the speakers gave an overview of the purpose of board committees, which is to allow smaller groups of board members to focus on issues that are too complex and/or numerous to be addressed by the entire board. Committees meet regularly to undertake a specific set of tasks, and then recommend actions and policy for approval by the entire board. Graham described the ad-hoc board recruitment committee recently formed by the National Neighborhood Networks Consortia (NNNC). As an ad hoc committee, it will dissolve once it has completed its mission of recruiting new board members. This is in contrast to standing committees, which address ongoing and major needs and issues and report their activities at board meetings.

The call concluded with a general question-and-answer period for participants.