

**MPC Social Equity Brown Bag Lunch Discussion
September 20, 2017 - Follow-Up Learning Ideas**

Table Talk: Maya Angelou's "Senegal"¹

As a foundation team, read Angelou's brief story of a dinner party she attended in Senegal. Discuss the social capital dynamics apparent in that event and explore lessons from the story for your own foundation's work. Here are some starter questions:

1. **Who's at the table?** Who was invited to the dinner party in Senegal, and why? Who's invited to meetings with your foundation? Is your foundation staff/board more "high touch" and generally accessible? Or is access to your foundation's table (e.g., physical meeting space, telephone or email contact, social media connections) limited to folks with whom you already have **bonding social capital** ("strong ties")?
2. **Who sets the table?** In the story, Angelou brings a lot of social capital to the table in terms of her **networks**, but very limited knowledge of the **norms** (shared values, customs, and understanding of the meanings of things) operative at the dinner party. Does your foundation (always/sometimes/never) share the responsibility or privilege of "setting the table" of your work, by including non-profits in the development of RFPs, selection of grant awards, and design of assessment and accountability processes? What are the pros and cons (or risks and opportunities) of building social capital, especially for nonprofits with limited access to foundation resources, through non-traditional, collaborative, and participatory strategies?
3. **Whose table is it?** Just as the table itself became a barrier to Angelou's ability to connect meaningfully with other dinner guests and their hosts in Senegal, traditional trappings of philanthropy - reception desks, conference rooms, board tables - can be a barrier to building social capital, especially bridging social capital for organizations led by and serving marginalized communities. Does your foundation allow nonprofits to offer hospitality at their own tables through, for example, site visits that aren't polished performances so much as sharing a typical day in the life of the community? Or by attending a nonprofit's community event that can serve as an alternative grant report?

¹ Maya Angelou, *Letter to my Daughter* (New York: Random House, 2009), chapter 8. Also available as a pdf at: <https://daewoncomp3.files.wordpress.com/2012/02/senegal.pdf>

Mapping Exercise²

Invite your foundation staff/board to complete the 2 mapping exercise handouts available at the website noted below: the circle of regular friends and contacts, and the chart noting whether those friends are similar (**bonding/strong ties**) or different (**bridging/weak ties**) from you. Then discuss:

- Ask each participant to describe their social capital. Is it more **bonding/strong ties** (people like me), or more **bridging/weak ties** (people different from me)? What areas of their life (interests, experiences, beliefs, etc.) are reflected in the chart? What do YOU value?
- Identify the kinds of organizations & communities your foundation supports. What kinds of social capital do the people in those organizations & communities bring to their work? What do THEY value? What kinds of social capital do they need increased access to?
- How can the collective social capital of your foundation's staff/board help to build the social capital of the organizations you support EQUITABLY? Be mindful of three functions of social capital:
 - BONDING - If your staff/board has lots of social capital in areas that align with programs you fund, how can you use your "strong ties" to increase support for organizations that have limited access to resources?
 - BRIDGING - If your staff/board has some/limited social capital in areas that you fund, how can you use your "weak ties" to increase support for organizations that have limited access to resources?
 - LINKING - How can your staff/board use your collective social capital to bring together folks with whom you have strong and weak ties to build social capital and increase support for organizations that have limited access to resources?

Social Capital One: What's/Who's In Your Wallet?

Business cards are a symbol of social capital in US professional circles. Gather up business cards you've gotten from others and sort them into two piles: those that represent **bonding (strong ties)** and **bridging (weak ties)** social capital.

² Based on work done by Rosalind Edwards; see <https://workfamily.sas.upenn.edu/archive/activities/mapping-your-social-capital-suggested-work-and-family-class-activity>

1. Are there more cards from people with whom you have deep connections (**bonding/strong ties**), or from those outside your closest relationships (**bridging/weak ties**)? What interest areas do you notice reflected in each pile?
2. Which cards in the **bridging/weak ties** pile most closely align with your foundation's current interests? Which align with interests you think your foundation should explore for potential future alignment (or to deepen your foundation's work in equity)? What can you do to build social capital for those individuals or organizations that have limited access to resources?
3. Do you know of other funders or folks in your **bonding/strong ties** pile, whose interests might align with nonprofits (or other funders) in your **bridging/weak ties** pile? How can you use your social capital with other funders to **LINK** those nonprofits to other potential resources and increase their social capital?
4. Are there individuals/organizations in your **weak ties** pile that you could **LINK** to each other, to increase their social capital with each other?

On a Plate

Read as a foundation team the blog/cartoon called "On a Plate"

(<http://thewireless.co.nz/articles/the-pencilword-on-a-plate>). Then discuss the role of social capital in the lives of foundation staff/board members and the grantee staffs/boards and communities which the foundation supports. Here are some starters:

1. Does your own life experience and the social capital you currently have available look most like that of Richard or of Paula? Explain.
2. Do most of the organizations and communities your foundation supports seem to align more with Richard's experience or with Paula's? Name examples of each.
3. Does your foundation have a stated commitment to **equity**?³ If so, what are some ways your foundation tries to achieve equity for organizations whose social capital (or access to resources) is more like Paula's than Richard's?

³ Maine Philanthropy Center defines equity as: "The just and fair inclusion of groups and populations into a system, organization, community or society in which all can participate, prosper, and reach their potential."