Government Partnerships
From unconventional to essential partnerships

AN OVERVIEW

BACKGROUND
Funding from county contracts is often essential revenue for community based organizations. It’s funding they need to be able to do their critical work in community. Counties for their part, rely on community based partners to translate public dollars into vital community services.

We’re all focused on positive community outcomes - so how can our network improve contracting relationships so that they work better for all partners and make our impact sustainable?

Members brought this question loud and clear at MACC’s 2018 Member Summit. Post-Summit MACC began conducting research, individual interviews, and small group conversations to better understand and define the scope of inquiry.

THE COUNTY CONTRACTING CONVERSATIONS
In early 2019 the network began pulling members together for focused conversations. We hosted two member dialogues to uncover:

1. What are the challenges we share?
2. What’s working well right now? What are the ‘bright spots’?
3. What work could we do together? What are the opportunities?

We held two dialogues facilitated by experienced consultant Cheryl Jensen, Manager Partner, Strategic Consulting, LLC.

THE HARVEST
In this document you will find:

1. A list of attendees at each dialogue
2. The summarized full notes from each conversation
3. A visual harvest captured live at each dialogue.

If you have any questions about the conversations or the initiative overall please contact: Laurel Hansen, MACC Program Manager, 612-230-5731 or Laurel.Hansen@macc-mn.org
Dialogue Participants:
Brian Russ, Annex Teen Clinic
Molly Greenman, The Family Partnership
Ann Gaasch, FamilyWise
Juan Peraza, Pillsbury United Communities
Mike Wynn, Emerge Community Development
Jill Pearson-Wood, Emerge Community Development
Heather Wilmot-LeMay, St. Stephen's
Mark Downey, PCYC
Mary Serie, Family Enhancement Center
Cheryl Jensen, Strategic Consulting & Coaching
Steve Houtz, MACC
Trisha Reinhold, MACC
Clara Owen, MACC
Laurel Hansen, MACC

Member Sharing:

What is working well between Community Based Organizations (CBO's) and County Contacts?

- Where strong relationships exist, there are examples of innovation- pilots, testing new approaches, and expanded services. Peer relationships and partnerships go beyond contracts and vendor relationships. They are grounded in shared vision, understanding, and goals.
- Relationships are enhanced when the following occurs: co-creation, in-person communication, community meetings, multiple staff engaged, open meetings, shared input, agreement on shared problems and goals.
- In instances where relationships and contracts are working, there are examples of invoices paid on time, flexibility in allocations and budget revisions, responsiveness, and longer-term contracts.
- County relationships include the county point people & contractors, county planners, commissioners, decision makers. Having more people at the table seems to positively impact contractual relationships.

What are the current challenges between Community Based Organizations (CBO's) and County Contacts?

- The requirements of county contracts aren’t fully covered by the contract payment terms.
- Contract rates with non-profits are static, lack provisions to address rising costs, need more transparency, especially when compared to how for-profit providers are compensated.
- CBO’s struggle with staff turnover, impacted by contract terms that don’t provide competitive pay rates that support staff retention.
- County relationships need to recognize that CBO’s are doing the government’s social work and recognize the return on investment that the government receives from the work of CBO’s.
- County and CBO’s need to work cooperatively to address growing administrative complexity of contracts.
Recommendations to strengthen relationships and improve contracts:

- Engage county representatives from all levels in the work of CBO’s. Communicate, share, invite, meet. Be transparent and ask for transparency.
- Elevate the building of county relationships within CBO’s. Have a “Relationship Management Strategy”. Provide staff training on relationship building, layer county relationships, and strategically engage county representatives in organizations. Include effective county relationships as a requirement of staff job descriptions.
- CBO’s must analyze contracts and RFP’s and complete risk assessments. They must ensure contracts will not deplete resources and become unprofitable. (MACC offers financial services in this arena). Organizations should be disciplined about contracts that deplete their resources and should share this concern with the County to be transparent.
- During contract negotiation, address the need for CBO sustainability thru fair contract terms. CBO’s will not be able to continue to serve government needs if their work isn’t sustainable thru adequate terms.
- Higher wages for CBO’s must be addressed prior to county contract RFP’s to ensure contract terms cover service delivery costs. Also encourage county to apply for state and/or federal funds to cover wage growth. Ask them to be part of the solution.
- Consider a joint approach with MACC members to address the significant issue of county contracts not adequately fulfilling CBO’s efforts to meet contract requirements, regulations, and administration. Make this an item to address at a convening with county representatives.
- Pursue and recommend contracts that exceed 2+ years, to reduce time invested in pursuing and negotiating contracts.
- Address any issues of un-timely payments as needed. Contract terms should call for a commitment to timely payments.
- Co-create approaches to ensure that both partners are invested and agree on issues and goals. Show counties how outcomes are improved when co-creation is the approach.
- Ask counties to provide the opportunity for their staff to learn more about CBO’s and how services are provided during their onboarding experience.
- MACC members can collaborate, share expertise, learn, and support each other. There is significant experience within MACC membership.

Other Potential Steps:

- Complete additional research and examples of effective county relationships & partnerships.
- Further sharing and action around National Imperative Report.
- Coordinate a convening with local county representatives.
- Develop and propose a county partner pilot to demonstrative a different approach.
- Use MACC’s collective scale. Gather cumulative contract information from members. Share the challenges of operating unrealistic contracts that don’t cover costs to provide outcomes. Illustrate the collective impact that is served through CBO contracts with counties.
- Consider other “crowd tools” for gathering CBO data and analysis around contracts and services.
The question: What’s working well right now? What are the bright spots in our work with county partners?

The question: What are the challenges? What’s getting the way of the work?

The question: What could we do together? What could the work look like?
Dialogue Participants:
Paige Sumera, Keystone Community Services
Julie Ellefson, Southside Family Nurturing Center
Holly Calvillo, Neighborhood House
Joan Schlect, Neighborhood House
Nancy Brady, Neighborhood House
Denise Smieja, The Link
Charlie Thompson, Neighbors Inc.
Kristine Martin, East Side Neighborhood Services
Steve Houtz, MACC
Trisha Reinwald, MACC
Clara Owen, MACC
Cheryl Jensen, Strategic Consulting & Coaching

Member Sharing:
What is working well between Community Based Organizations (CBO’s) and County Contacts?
- There are benefits of investing in strong county relationships. Examples of funding amount increases year to year. Strong relationships with program managers and county commissioners are critical. Face time & engagement matters.
- Take time to discover shared objectives and be transparent.
- Opportunities to be community leaders, trusted partners and valued experts.
- Improvements have been noted in RFP process, communication of expectations, information sharing, etc.
- The ongoing revenue stream from contracts is appreciated. Trusted relationships resulting in consistent funding.
- Dakota County has been proactive in asking about costs and more effective partnerships. (Kelly Harder is director and accessible to CBO’s).

What are the current challenges between Community Based Organizations (CBO’s) and County Contacts?
- Concern about true costs of contracts that can include large time commitments. County rates can be locked in for 3-5 years, while costs are rising.
- Funding doesn’t adequately cover overhead, administration, salaries. Stress of financial management of multiple contracts. Reporting requirements and billing can stress financial capacity. Admin caps are ridiculous.
- There can be inconsistencies between multiple grant managers and funders. Changes to grants during grant period can be challenging. Turnover at County adds to challenge in creating relationships.
- Hennepin County can be hard to collaborate and negotiate with because of size, but improvements and diversity have been noted.
- Insufficient time to develop equitable contracts and gaps between contract periods. Lag times in payments creates challenges, while CBO’s continue to provide service, with no retro pay. Salary mandates can be non-negotiable.
- Challenges of regulations and variations of counties, state, and federal entities. County lines can create barriers.
Significant time is also required to maintain multiple relationships with various county contacts. Navigating contracts is cumbersome and difficult especially for small organizations, who can get left out. Needs more “human centered design”. Not one size fits all.

**Recommendations to strengthen relationships and improve contracts:**

- Attempt to negotiate ratios and admin rates, with a unified voice. Use an approach of being “mutually beneficial” rather than demanding.
- Consider how the MACC Network jointly could help overall positioning of CBO’s as experts with Counties and present a unified voice. Use collective voice and scale of the Network.
- Bring trust and transparency to relationships with counties. Utilize established relationships to grow revenue thru increases in funding amounts. Remain a resource.
- Explore the uncertainty about asking for support and/or stipends when our organizations step up to serve county needs.
- Identify, explore, & attempt to replicate best practices that work at various counties and departments. (Example: Neighbor’s Inc with Dakota County & Kelly Harder)
- Understand the constraints counties operate under, from state and federal.
- Counties have concerns about racial inequities and embedded racism in the criminal justice system; recognize that CBO’s are valued partners in addressing this.
- Developing relationships with Commissioners are essential if you have high levels of organizational funding. Make the rounds, and also share those visits with county staff so they are aware.
- Increase diversity of MACC members at the table, working collectively.

**Other Potential Steps:**

- Suggested Informational Interviews with Counties. Discover “low hanging fruit” and opportunities to “take risk”. Understand County thoughts and “pain points”.
- The following individuals identified as important connections: Jennifer, Kelly, Ryan (tbd).
The question: What’s working well right now? What are the bright spots in our work with county partners?

The question: What are the challenges? What’s getting the way of the work?

The question: What could we do together? What could the work look like?