



February, 2015  
From the desk of AFN Director, Joe Antolin

### Meeting the Mission

Over its 10 year existence, AFN has stayed true to its mission to increase the knowledge and capacity of funders to effectively increase financial security of low-moderate income individuals and families through asset-building strategies.

Our fifth biennial national grantmakers conference in Dallas, *Integrating Across Sectors*, is focused on an innovative funding approach that recognizes the need for a collaborative, cross-sectional method for bringing greater economic security and upward mobility to many of the nation's families. We will take a close look at the asset-building strategies that are effectively working to address the reality of the financial insecurity challenges facing our communities today:

- gender, racial and ethnic wealth gaps;
- decreased home ownership rates;
- unaffordable post-secondary education,
- growing asset poverty.

Financial insecurity neither reflects justice or equity. Playing by the rules and working hard does not create financial security. This seems at odds with our shared belief in an American Dream. AFN, by and through its members, believes that reinvigorating opportunity is both a private and public sector challenge. We develop and test asset-building strategies and the policies needed to achieve greater returns on investment. It's been shown that philanthropy, coupled with its grantees, can and will lead the way, whether it's launching new ideas; experimenting with different paths; establishing common metrics, best practices and scaling approaches; funding research; and defining what has to change to achieve systemic and broad impact.

2015 promises to be a critical year. With more states and cities understanding the steep challenges facing its residents, politicians are rhetorically calling for policies to reinforce the middle class. Thus, asset-building strategies will increasingly be a key part of the policy and practice answer for many years to come.

AFN and its growing membership are poised to deliver. By focusing on funding strategies that provide complementary growth across sectors and fuel positive change and impact in communities across the country, AFN's conference in Dallas provides grantmakers an opportunity to hear and learn how to invest in a creative model that has the potential to generate a significant return.

Staff and Board members of foundations, United Ways, and private funders are encouraged to come to AFN's 2015 Grantmakers National Conference, *Integrating Across Sectors*. Join us in Dallas. Share your knowledge. Exchange ideas! [Join AFN.](#)

## AFN FUNDER CONVENINGS

### REGISTER NOW 2015 AFN Grantmaker Conference



Join us for the

#### 2015 GRANTMAKER CONFERENCE

INTEGRATING  
Across Sectors



April 7-9, 2015 • Dallas, Texas

AFN's unique funders-only conference brings together a diverse group of national, regional and community-based funders concerned about a common goal - providing individuals, families, and communities with greater economic security and opportunities for growth.

Designed in partnership with Funders in the field, this conference delivers an agenda filled with fresh strategies, evaluation opportunities and results-oriented sessions that every grantmaker can use to leverage the asset building framework to advance the impact of their work.

**BREAKOUT SESSIONS ARE FILLING QUICKLY - [Click here](#) to learn more and register!**

**ELIGIBILITY:** Any organization eligible for AFN membership is eligible to attend the annual conference. This includes trustees, staff, and consultants of Foundations, Corporate Giving Programs, Grantmaker Affinity Groups or Regional Associations, United Way organizations, and Public Charities. Federal Reserve Bank staff as well as Government representatives with oversight of grant or investment dollars that impact the asset-building field are also eligible to attend.

**WEBINAR -  
Worker-Owned Cooperatives:  
Moving Beyond Personal Financial Products  
to Expand Ownership Opportunities  
for America's Working Families**



**Thursday, March 5th  
11:00-12:00pm PST**

Join AFN on Thursday, March 5th at 11am PST/2pm EST for **Worker-Owned Cooperatives: Moving Beyond Personal Financial Products to Expand Ownership Opportunities for America's Working Families.**

In today's economy, holding down a job (or even two) is not enough to get out of poverty, and savings and micro-enterprise programs cannot always bridge the gap. Worker-owned cooperatives represent a new iteration of asset-building strategies that can move low-income families, including communities of color that are hardest hit by wage and wealth gaps, toward financial security.

Worker-ownership combines quality job creation with shared entrepreneurship opportunities to enable low-wage workers to increase their skills, income, and assets.

Join AFN on March 5th to learn about current research on how worker-owned businesses build assets, and the success factors in worker coop development; and hear from leaders from two cutting-edge initiatives on the latest research demonstrating how worker-owned businesses build assets and the success factors in worker-coop development:

- **Project Equity** works on multiple pathways to expanding worker ownership in the San Francisco Bay Area, including incubating and converting businesses, and
- **Opportunity Threads**, a worker-owned cut-and-sew factory, is leading efforts to revitalize North Carolina's textile industry.

Moderator:  
Stephanie Upp, AFN Program Manager

Speakers:

- **Hilary Abell**, Co-founder of **Project Equity** and author of **Worker Cooperatives: Pathways to Scale**
- **Molly Hemstreet**, Co-founder and General Manager of **Opportunity Threads** and **Carolina Textile District**

To register for the webinar, please [click here](#), or press the Register button below.

**REGISTER** 

**Upcoming Spring 2015  
Peer-Learning Webinars**

[Click here](#) to join the interest list for the upcoming Spring AFN webinars, **Strategic Philanthropy**, featuring the Institute for Assets and Social Policy at Brandeis University, **Retirement Savings Strategies**, featuring the latest policy moves, including MyRA, in securing retirement, and **Women and Assets** with Dr. Mariko Chang.

[Click here](#) to see our full lineup of AFN 2015 webinars and convenings!



**EVENTS IN THE FIELD**

**Council on Foundations  
Philanthropy Week in Washington  
Washington, DC**

**March 16-20, 2015**

Philanthropy Week in Washington informs policymakers of the vital importance of the work philanthropy does for communities across the country. Council on Foundations invites funders to the nation's capital for a variety of programs that highlight both



**Philanthropy Week  
IN WASHINGTON**

philanthropy's role and some of the challenges and opportunities in the 114th Congress, in our federal agencies, and with the Administration.

[Click here](#) to view the Agenda.

[Click here](#) to Register.

**Grant Makers Network (GMN)  
10<sup>th</sup> Annual Conference  
Washington, DC**



**March 16-18, 2015**

Perspectives on the why, what, and who of grants management are changing. The connections between grant practices and the ultimate success of those grants are becoming better understood and valued. And perspectives on who grants management practitioners are continue to evolve as well, as the job encompasses an ever-widening set of responsibilities, skills, and competencies. This GMN conference focuses on exploring these new perspectives about how grants get made and who is engaged in this profession.

With more than 60 sessions, expanded networking time, and new features like Short Talks, GMN's 2015 conference truly offers something for everyone on the grantmaking team. Follow GMN's nine learning tracks or focus on an interest group track like corporate grantmaking or sessions for managers.

[Click here](#) to learn more.

**Federal Reserve System  
Community Development Research Conference  
Washington, D.C.**



**April 2-3, 2015**

The Community Affairs Officers of the Federal Reserve System hosts the ninth biennial Federal Reserve System Community Development Research Conference. Over the years, this unique event has aimed to bridge the gap between research, policy and practice on key issues facing the country. The 2015 conference in April seeks to inform a robust public conversation about economic mobility.

[Click here](#) to learn more.

**Collective Impact Forum Funders Convening  
*Catalyzing Large Scale Change:  
The Funder's Role in Collective Impact*  
New Orleans, LA**



**May 4-6, 2015**

*Catalyzing Large Scale Change: The Funder's Role in Collective Impact* convening is designed specifically for grantmakers to provide opportunities for deep learning and peer-exchange on a range of important topics. Overall themes for the collective impact funder convening will include:

- Equity
- Leadership
- Effectiveness
- Community Engagement and Inclusion

[Click here](#) to learn more.

## 2015 ASSETS & OPPORTUNITY SCORECARD

**New Scorecard Data Shows  
Economic Recovery  
Bypassing Million of  
American Households**

CFED has released the 2015 Assets & Opportunity Scorecard. Each year, the **Scorecard** offers the most comprehensive look available at American's financial



security today and their opportunity to create a more prosperous future.

It is a powerful research and advocacy tool that helps paint the full picture of household financial insecurity in America. This year's **Scorecard** brings together over 130 policy and outcome measures for all 50 states and the District of Columbia to help make the case for asset-based policy reform that expands economic opportunity for all Americans.

Key highlights from this year's **Scorecard** include:

- Top-level analysis on the economic recovery at the household level.
- New outcome measures, including the scope of income inequality and the number of disconnected youth in each state.
- A comprehensive assessment of the policies states should adopt to create opportunity for their residents.
- Analysis of how Scorecard data can be used to affect meaningful change in your state.
- An online liquid asset poverty calculator.

[Click here](#) to view or download full report.

## BUILDING WEALTH

### EITC: AN ASSET BUILDING OPPORTUNITY

As the Internal Revenue Service started processing returns last month, it joined partners nationwide in launching the **Earned Income Tax Credit Awareness outreach campaign** to ensure that millions of low-and moderate-income workers get the credit they deserve, and get it right.

Local officials and community organizations across the country have been hosting outreach events highlighting the benefits of this key work incentive for individuals and families who earned \$51,567 or less last year. An estimated four out of five eligible workers and families get the credit, but *millions miss it annually* either because they don't claim it when filing or don't file a tax return at all.



The EITC varies depending on income, family size and filing status. The IRS has upgraded the **interactive EITC Assistant** to better help taxpayers and tax preparers. People can answer questions about income, family size and filing status, among other things. The **EITC Assistant** will help determine eligibility and will figure an estimated EITC refund. Taxpayers can even get a printout explaining why they do or do not qualify. *Last year, over 27 million eligible workers and families received more than \$63 billion total in EITC, with an average EITC amount of \$2,300.*

New this season is the penalty that will be placed on people who did not comply with the Affordable Care Act's (ACA) requirement that most Americans have to have health insurance **starting in 2014**. The amount of which a person pays depends on several factors, including income and family size.

[Click here](#) to read more.

[Click here](#) to learn more about the ACA penalty.

### Senator Brown Turns to EITC to help Lower-Income Workers Avoid Costly Payday Loans

U.S. Senator Sherrod Brown (D-OH) outlined a new plan Wednesday that would allow eligible lower-income workers to access a portion of their Earned Income Tax Credit (EITC) in advance, as an alternative to more costly lending options. The **Early Refund EITC** would provide zero-interest, short-term cash advances to workers - many of whom live paycheck to paycheck - to help cover the cost of monthly bills and promote financial stability throughout the year.



The EITC has typically been paid out as a lump sum at tax time. In order to receive the Early Refund EITC, workers would need to enroll in the program through their employers at mid-year and request an advance payment.

[Click here](#) to read more.

## MICROBUSINESS UPDATE

[Do Microbusinesses Create](#)

## "Good" Jobs?

FIELD at the Aspen Institute explored this question last year in their report and companion microsite, "**Microbusinesses, Gainful Jobs.**" Last month, they kicked-off expansion of this in-depth qualitative study by speaking to employees at businesses owned by borrowers of the **Accion U.S. Network.**

During an economic recovery in which many families still struggle to make ends meet, we need to do more than create jobs - we need to create good jobs. Microbusinesses create jobs, but what are those jobs really like? FIELD's interviews go beyond the most common measures of a "good" job - wages and benefits - to explore other critical components of job quality, such as scheduling stability and flexibility, and opportunities to develop skills and to advance.

Stay tuned, updated findings will be available in the spring.

## MICROBUSINESSES, GAINFUL JOBS

Luz E. Gomez  
and Tamra Theford



## CHILDREN'S SAVINGS ACCOUNTS

### Rhode Island Babies are College Bound

Newborn infants in Rhode Island will leave the hospital with two things: a birth certificate and bank account. Starting in January, Rhode Island is streamlining an existing college savings program known as **CollegeBoundBaby.**

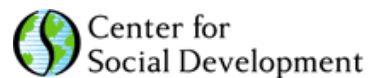
Since the initiative's start in 2010, enrolled infants each receive \$100 in a 529 savings plan from Rhode Island, but it's been highly underutilized due to a unwieldy application that required parents to supply multiple pages of information and pick an investment strategy. As a result, only 400 families enrolled, according to the **Providence Journal.** But now, parents can now sign up the day their child is born by simply checking a box on the birth certificate form, a small fix that the newly elected governor Gina Raimondo hopes will boost the program's reach.



The small cash incentive not only provides some economic certainty, it also forces the parents to think about long-term financial planning and sets goals to which young people can aspire. **Studies show** children with dedicated savings for higher education are seven times as likely to attend college. (For those not seeking a B.A., money in 529 accounts can be used to pay for trade, technical or vocational school; if not used by age 25, it reverts back to a state's education fund.)

[Click here](#) to read the Press Announcement.

### Latest Brief Proposes a National CDA Policy



Since 2001, the Center for Social Development (CSD) at the Washington University in St. Louis has been researching 529 college savings plans and policy innovations, with the goal of establishing inclusive asset-building policies. In a brief just released last month, **College Savings Plans: A Platform for Inclusive and Progressive Child Development Accounts**, CSD proposes a universal (all children) and progressive (greatest subsidies for the poorest children) national CDA policy.

[Click here](#) to read the latest brief.

### Law Creates Special Savings Accounts for Disabled People

With his signature last December to the Achieving a Better Life Experience (ABLE), President Obama paved the way for people with disabilities to open tax-free savings accounts where they can amass more than \$2,000 without losing



government benefits. The new law allows people with disabilities to open special accounts where they can save up to \$100,000 without risking eligibility for Social Security and other government programs. What's more, individuals can keep their Medicaid coverage no matter how much money is accrued in an ABLÉ account.

Modeled after 529 college savings plans, interest earned on savings will be tax-free. Funds accrued in the accounts can be used to pay for education, health care, transportation, housing and other expenses. To be eligible, individuals must have a condition that occurred before age 26 and each person may only open one ABLÉ account. Under current gift-tax limitations, as much as \$14,000 could be deposited annually.

[Click here](#) to read more on the progress of ABLÉ

[Click here](#) to read the article from the NY Times about ABLÉ.

## TAX POLICY REFORM AND UPDATES

### Expand Economic Opportunity: Turn Upside-Down Tax Programs Right-Side Up



This CFED comprehensive analysis takes a hard look at the \$540 billion in spending on federal tax programs that support asset building through homeownership, retirement savings, liquid savings and higher education.

The federal government spends billions of dollars each year to help Americans build assets, but this paper highlights that this spending isn't helping most low- and moderate-income households.

[Click here](#) to read the analysis.

### Report Outlines Specifics on Who Benefits from Low Tax Rates for Capital Gains



**Tax Policy Center**  
Urban Institute and Brookings Institution

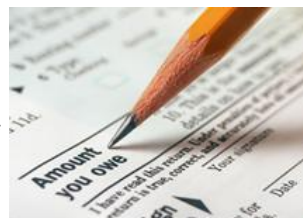
The Tax Policy Center's latest brief, [Net Gains Across Zip Codes](#), examines net capital gains realizations by utilizing zip-code level data on taxes and demographics. This data helps shed light on direct beneficiaries of preferential capital gains tax rates beyond the standard distributional tables based solely on income. It highlights the extent to which the benefits are concentrated among zip codes, and the limited benefits of preferred rates for certain geographic regions.

[Click here](#) for the Report Summary.

[Click here](#) to read the Full Report.

### The IRS Code: Why Anti-Poverty Advocates Should Care

In the latest [commentary](#) for *Spotlight*, contributor Heather McCulloch, director of the Tax Policy Project, argues that reforms to the tax code could lift families out of poverty and give more people the opportunity to invest in their future.



McCulloch [cites research](#) indicating that the vast majority of tax benefits in the U.S. accrue to the wealthiest Americans, fueling inequality and reducing the share of federal dollars available for anti-poverty programs. McCulloch suggests that reforms such as strengthening refundable tax credits, creating new credits that offer public matching funds, and expanding access to tax-incented savings could create a more inclusive and equitable tax code.

The author argues that while the intricacies of tax policy may be daunting, the stakes are too high for low-income households and households of color for advocates to simply punt these issues.

## FINANCIAL COACHING

### New Technology to Revolutionize

## Financial Coaching and Case Management Practices

Center for Asset Building Opportunities (CABO) has selected **OPTA Metrics** as the data platform for the Los Angeles Coaching Network (LA-FCN). Through this partnership, OPTA is providing training and product licenses to ten nonprofit organizations in Los Angeles starting in the first quarter of 2015.

**OPTAMetrics** is a multifaceted Data Assisted Financial Coaching system. It not only enables organizations to track the delivery of their programs and services, but also features a powerful interface for collecting, tracking, and analyzing financial and behavioral data for financial coaching and case management programs. In order to utilize the system, financial coaches receive special training that equips them with the knowledge to understand household financial data and helps them learn how to use the data in order to customize coaching plans for each client.

[Click here](#) to learn more about this latest technology.

## IN THE NEWS

### ***A Shattered Foundation*** **Homeownership a Good Bet** **for Emerging Middle Class Families?**

This **Washington Post** piece raises the question if racial neutral wealth building strategies maybe need a more nuisance approach. Is homeownership a good bet for emerging middle class families? Read and share with us your opinion!



### **Working on Plan to Improve** **the Lives of Women in Chicago**

**AFN's Steering Committee Member, K. Sujata**, leads Chicago Foundation for Women's **latest research** on how women & girls in Chicago have gained, or not gained, traction over the last 20 years to get ahead economically.



## PEOPLE ON THE MOVE

### **Dallas Fed Names** **Alfreda Norman as** **Senior Vice President**

The Federal Reserve Bank of Dallas has appointed **Alfreda Norman** as senior vice president, responsible for the Bank's Community Development, Financial Institution Relationship Management and Public Affairs departments. Norman oversees the Bank's public outreach programs, which support economic growth and community development. Norman joined the Bank in 2004 as vice president and community development officer. Prior to her time at the Bank, she worked as a vice president for both the residential lending group and the neighborhood development office of Bank of America.



### **Brandee McHale Named** **President of the Citi Foundation** **and Director of Corporate** **Citizenship for Citi**

Last month, Citi announced Brandee McHale as the new President of the Citi Foundation and Director of Corporate Citizenship for Citi. McHale succeeds Pamela Flaherty, who retired at the end of January after 46 years with Citi. Ed Skyler, Citi's Executive Vice President for Global Public Affairs, remains Chairman of the Citi Foundation.

Citi Foundation





In her new role, McHale oversees the Foundation's work to promote economic progress and improve the lives of people in low-income communities around the world. In 2014, the Citi Foundation enabled 1.1 million people in 85 countries to work toward specific economic empowerment goals.

## 2015 ELM<sup>2</sup> Fellows Announced



FIELD at the Aspen Institute and the Capital One Foundation announced last month the 2015 fellows of the **ELM<sup>2</sup> (Emerging Leaders in Microbusiness Squared) Progra**. ELM<sup>2</sup> aims to exponentially increase the talent within the microenterprise development industry. Twelve emerging leaders who demonstrate potential for executive leadership and creating real change in the microbusiness field have been selected to participate.

- Aaron Aldrich, Business Education Director, Bridgeway Capital (Pittsburgh, PA)
- Jonathan Coleman, Director of Programs, ASSETS Lancaster (Lancaster, PA)
- Elisa Cooke, Director of Compliance, Economic and Community Development Institute, (Columbus, OH)
- Esther Fraser, Director of Communications, Rising Tide Capital (Jersey City, NJ)
- Ursulette Huntley, Incubator Program Director, Unlimited Future, Inc. (Huntington, WV)
- Aida Ibragimova, Chief Lending Officer, Justine PETERSEN Housing and Reinvestment Corporation (St. Louis, MO)
- Danny Isaacs, Enterprise Development Project Specialist, Mountain Association for Community Economic Development (Berea, KY)
- Kyle Johnson, Lending Team Manager, Accion Chicago (Chicago, IL)
- Brendan Landry, Director of Programs, Rocky Mountain Microfinance Institute (Denver, CO)
- Jonny Price, Senior Director, Kiva (San Francisco, CA)
- Teshite Wako, Chief Financial Officer, Neighborhood Development Center (St. Paul, MN)
- Lauren Williams, Program Manager, CFED (Washington, DC)

[Click here](#) to read more.

## Making the Connection Between Housing and Health

In order for American communities to be healthy, we must address both health and housing issues. There are clear connections between poverty, lack of affordable housing, and poor health. Blogger **Jonathan Reckford** takes a look and comments on the connections linking housing and health.



[Click here](#) to read the post.

### **Engage Now - Join AFN**

The **Asset Funders Network (AFN)** is a membership organization of national, regional and community-based foundations and grantmakers strategic about using philanthropy to promote economic opportunity and financial security for low- and moderate-income Americans. AFN works to increase the capacity of its members to effectively promote economic opportunity and financial security by supporting efforts that help low and moderate income individuals build and protect assets.

AFN is a must for funders wanting to see families and communities move from surviving to thriving, from vulnerability to opportunity, and from insecurity to long-term well-being. Through membership, innovative and promising approaches are shared, promoting both scale and effectiveness while also increasing financial security for individuals and working families.

Connect, educate and empower. Join the conversation.

To join or find out more about AFN, contact [Kristen, AFN Membership Coordinator](#).

[Contact Us](#)

[AFN Steering Committee](#)

[Membership](#)